

# From Myth-Conceived to Myth-Understood:

France's Revolutionary *Ordre Profond* Revisited

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# I. “His ‘300 Spartans’ unfortunately ran away”<sup>1</sup>

General Dumouriez breathed in the fall air. The cannonade had begun early that morning – November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1792 – and the deafening boom of the guns had continued for several hours but produced no results. The Austrians, lined on a hill at the end of the plain, sat content in their redoubts and trenches, undisturbed by the French artillery.<sup>2</sup> Resolute, Dumouriez instructed his soldiers, waiting on the plains of Jemappes with their bayonets affixed, to begin the advance.<sup>3</sup> Dumouriez and the Duc of Chartres – later known as Louis-Philippe, King of France – arranged the centre of the army into columns and began slowly forward, maintaining a steady front.<sup>4</sup> Then the Austrians began to fire. Bullets pounded the columns of French soldiers, many of whom had

<sup>1</sup> Paddy Griffith, regarding Dumouriez’s failed attempt to model his campaign in Valmy after the battle between the Spartans and Persians at Thermopylae. Paddy Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France, 1789-1802* (London: Greenhill Books, 1998), 203.

<sup>2</sup> “Battle of Jemappes: Fought on the 6<sup>th</sup> of November, 1792, between the Austrian and French Armies,” in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. “The Military Mentor,” (London: Richard Philips, 1809): 77.

<sup>3</sup> Dumouriez, quoted in “Battle of Jemappes,” 78.

<sup>4</sup> John A. Lynn, “The Battle of Jemappes,” in *Historical Dictionary of the French Revolution, 1789-1799*, ed. Samuel F. Scott and Barry Rothhaus (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 77-78.

never fought in battle before. Bodies crashed to the ground and the noise of the screams combined with the noise of the “incessant fire” from the Austrians.<sup>5</sup> The soldiers could not maintain their march forward. Due to their formation in column, the French troops were unable to effectively return fire.<sup>6</sup> Consequently, the columns collapsed, some soldiers retreating as fast as they could, others taking cover, and others still running towards the trenches in an effort to avoid the advancing Austrian cavalry.<sup>7</sup> “Cut to pieces” by fire and fearing Dumouriez to be dead – his horse having been shot beneath him – the French soldiers went into a state of blind panic.<sup>8</sup>

Yet all was not lost. Still alive, Dumouriez ordered an artillery barrage on the Austrian cavalry, sending them into retreat. He then positioned his veterans, bayonets affixed, behind the chaos where his columns once stood, ordering the veterans to kill any French soldier who retreated.<sup>9</sup> Suffering immense casualties in the advance, but faced with no other choice, the mass of soldiers pressed forward against the hill. Two hours later, the battle was won. Roughly 300 Austrians lay strewn across the battlefield. Almost 2000 French soldiers lay with them, dead or wounded.<sup>10</sup> The next day, Dumouriez – a hero of Valmy – allegedly had the bodies of several hundred French soldiers thrown into a pit, and reported to the Government in Paris that he had only lost a few hundred men during the victorious charge of his columns.<sup>11</sup> France celebrated its first major battle victory of the Revolutionary Wars.

The French Revolutionary Wars are much studied, yet the success of the Revolutionary armies often overshadows the brutal reality of the battlefield. Many have examined the

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<sup>5</sup> “Battle of Jemappes,” 78.

<sup>6</sup> David G Chandler, *Dictionary of the Napoleonic Wars* (London: Arms and Armour Press, 1979), 214.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibidem*; M.A. Thiers, *The History of the French Revolution*, vol. 2., trans. Frederick Shoberl (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1844), 8.

<sup>8</sup> “Battle of Jemappes,” 79.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*; Thiers, 9.

<sup>10</sup> Chandler, 214.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 81; Thiers, 9.

inspiration of the Revolutionary troops on the battlefield, their commander, the army logistical organization, and the propaganda.<sup>12</sup> However, battlefield tactics have been given comparatively little attention. Why did Dumouriez and the Duc of Chartres deploy their soldiers in column at Jemappes? Why, when they knew they had an advantage in firepower and in artillery, and while they knew the Austrians had well entrenched artillery and a strong cavalry force, did they not deploy in line or square, formations which would take advantage of French firepower and/or better defend against cavalry?<sup>13</sup> Moreover, why, in later descriptions of the Battle of Jemappes, were orderly columns of soldiers celebrated instead of the French cavalry and artillery, which had actually held the day? For many scholars the deployment in column at Jemappes was only natural. According to this line of thought, the French Revolution marks the dawn of modern warfare – a resurrection of the inherently successful principles of western warfare.<sup>14</sup> Inspired by the armies of antiquity, Revolutionary tacticians supposedly redesigned the entire shape of the battlefield, allowing troops to deploy in more flexible and progressive formations. These changes, it has been claimed, were the direct result of the political shift of the French Revolution. For example, Hans Delbruck, in seminal study *The Dawn of Modern Warfare*, states that the Revolutionary military system was “based on new political ideas and conditions.”<sup>15</sup> John Lynn, a leading expert in the Early Modern French Army, provides a similar example, announcing that aspects of the “Western Way of War” appeared “after an absence that stretched back to ancient

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<sup>12</sup> The reader should be aware that because the terms Revolutionary (in reference to the Revolutionary Wars or Revolutionary Period in France) and revolutionary (signifying ground-breaking or innovative) must necessarily be used frequently throughout this paper, the former will always be capitalized (Revolutionary) while the latter will remain in lower case (revolutionary) in order to avoid confusion.

<sup>13</sup> Thiers, 8.

<sup>14</sup> Hans Delbruck, *The Dawn of Modern Warfare*, trans. Walter J Renfroe Jr. (London: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 395; John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture from Ancient Greece to Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 184; Victor Davis Hanson, *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks: and their invention of Western Military Culture*, ed. John Keegan (London: Cassell, 1999), 20, 24.

<sup>15</sup> Delbruck, 395.

Rome.”<sup>16</sup> The Western Way of War he refers to is a concept promoted by Victor Davis Hanson, a scholar of Greek hoplite warfare,<sup>17</sup> who likewise notes that these new modern armies, “free of religious fanaticism and subject to civilian control,” were successful due to the “dominance of infantry,” a practice which Hanson suggests dates back to the Greeks, and “alone win[s] wars” decisively.<sup>18</sup> However, this argument leaves much to be desired.

Recently, scholars James Arnold, Ken Alder, and Paddy Griffith have led the way in reevaluating the differences between battlefield tactics and realities of Revolutionary and Napoleonic warfare.<sup>19</sup> With a wide range of primary sources and Enlightenment literature, this task initially seems a simple one. Indeed, numerous theses and descriptions were produced by tacticians and military leaders throughout the late eighteenth century which provide detailed and organized tactical plans of how the French armies should operate. Yet, the realities of battlefield tactics were often starkly different from the academic discussions and intentions of commanders.<sup>20</sup> This aspect of Revolutionary warfare has been largely neglected in academic discourse. Most scholars recognize that the French Revolutionary armies were disorganized, unpredictable, and often extremely lucky. However, many claim that the theoretical system on which they were based made the armies inherently successful. Accordingly, many suppose, Napoleon built on this success. However, as Arnold, Alder, and Griffith have made clear, our current view of Revolutionary battlefield tactics needs significant restructuring.

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<sup>16</sup> John A. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture from Ancient Greece to Modern America* (Cambridge, MA: Westview Press, 2003), 184.

<sup>17</sup> Warfare based on the hoplite warrior, the heavily-armed foot soldier of classical Greek armies, and the *phalanx*, the column-style unit containing these soldiers.

<sup>18</sup> Hanson, *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks*, 24.

<sup>19</sup> James Arnold's paper "A Reappraisal of the Column Versus the Line in the Peninsular War," Ken Alder's book *Engineering the Revolution*, and Paddy Griffith's book *The Art of War of Revolutionary France* have all been particularly helpful in providing context for this study.

<sup>20</sup> Paddy Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics 1792-1815* (New York: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 3.

The triumph of Revolutionary armies after 1792 has also overshadowed the reality of the tactical changes over the later eighteenth century, with many scholars tending to suppose that “revolutionary France chose to defend itself by creating whole new armies.”<sup>21</sup> Many works claim that Revolutionary tacticians were able to capitalise on ideas which the *ancien régime* had resisted for ideological reasons. These ideas, John Lynn claims, “provided a template for reality” for Revolutionary armies, and consequently transformed warfare, ushering in the modern era of warfare.<sup>22</sup> However, though Lynn’s argument is a tempting one, it ignores the considerable changes made during the mid- to late-eighteenth century. In the end, French tactical systems not only shared little in common with Revolutionary rhetoric, they were not intrinsically successful either. Thus, Revolutionary battle tactics should not be seen as the harbinger of success, but rather as one factor in the complex and fluctuating military system which had been building for decades. Specifically, this paper will examine the *ordre profond*, the column formation which Dumouriez selected for his advance at Jemappes. A deep order tactical formation inspired by the classical *phalanx*, the *ordre profond* has often been celebrated as the French armies’ key to success. I aim to demonstrate that this system was neither revolutionary in purpose nor in practice. Therefore, the *ordre profond*, or column, should not be seen as inherently successful, but as an overrated tactical system, exaggerated both by contemporaries and by modern scholars. In its second and third chapters, this paper will examine the birth of the *ordre profond* in order to highlight its proposed uses and supposed outcomes. Additionally, chapter IV will examine the tactical debates of the later eighteenth century in order to exhibit the continuities between *ancien régime* and Revolutionary tactics, demonstrating that the *ordre profond* did not appear suddenly after 1789. In chapter V, this paper will also examine the shortcomings of the column on the

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<sup>21</sup> John A. Lynn, *The Bayonets of the Republic: Motivation and Tactics in the Army of Revolutionary France, 1791-94* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 49.

<sup>22</sup> Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 185.

Revolutionary battlefields to reveal that, despite its celebrated position in military history, the *ordre profond* was in no way an inherently successful system, and contributed very little to the achievements of Revolutionary Armies.

Having established that the *ordre profond* was neither revolutionary nor successful, this study will then turn to examine the persistence of the *ordre* throughout the nineteenth century. Arguing that the *ordre* should have been abandoned during the Napoleonic Wars, chapter VI will examine the reasons why the *ordre* was – though in decline throughout the Napoleonic Wars – not abandoned. Chapter VII will then investigate the work of Antoine-Henri Jomini, the leading military thinker of the early nineteenth century, in order to determine the exact reputation which the *ordre* received. It will highlight Jomini's approach to and understanding of warfare in an attempt to understand his celebration of the *ordre profond*. Afterwards, it will examine conditions within the French military between 1815 and 1869 in order to suggest that it was for social and political reasons, as well as because of the nature of military history itself, that the *ordre profond* existed at least until the Franco-Prussian War in 1870-71.

In a concluding section, this paper will briefly examine modern military historiography in order to ascertain whether or not the same political and social factors still affect the historiography of the *ordre profond*.



## II. The Problem

Losses throughout the eighteenth century prompted serious reconsideration in all aspects of the French military. As opposed to the British, content in their Marlbourghian tactics, and the Prussians, successful using Frederick the Great's directives, the French were without a successful or reliable tactical system.<sup>23</sup> Losses in Louis XIV's wars, the War of Austrian Succession, and the Seven Years' War prompted tacticians to search for a new method of battlefield operations. France's strong and dynamic intellectual community provided an infrastructure for these losses and military dilemmas to be deconstructed, extrapolated, discussed, and revised.<sup>24</sup> In 1703, Marquis de Vauban, Marshal of France, published his *Traité de l'attaque des places*, in which he attempted to standardise French siege methods according to scientific and systematic procedures. Though his methods were not always successful, his approach provided a template for future

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<sup>23</sup> Madeleine Dobie, "The Enlightenment at War," *Publications of the Modern Language Association* 124, no.5 (Oct. 2009): 1851.

<sup>24</sup> Indeed, the military trends of the time were very much incorporated into the intellectual currents of the Enlightenment, and the intellectual infrastructure (*salons*, book-trading circles, and intellectual journals) were put to good use by military writers. Sandra L. Powers, "Studying the Art of War: Military Books known to American Officers and Their French Counterparts during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Military History* 70, no. 3 (July 2006). In fact, Deborah Avant suggests, the themes of the Enlightenment provided the intellectual grounding for the entire approach to new tactics. Deborah Avant, "From Mercenary to Citizen Armies: Explaining Change in the Practice of War," *International Organization* 54, no.1 (Winter 2000): 43.

tacticians.<sup>25</sup> Following his example, and approaching warfare by using a similar method, tacticians outlined three major problems in the French army. While other problems certainly existed, the prominence of the discussion of these three problems in the century's major tactical works indicates that they would be paramount to the new shape of battlefield systems:

1. *Desertion*: Early Modern armies were often devastated by desertion, and the consistently plummeting numbers caused great expense and limited the effectiveness of French armies. As early as 1644, Cardinal Jules Mazarin wrote to the Vicomte du Turenne, then Marshal of France, looking for recruits and claiming that as much as two-thirds of the army had deserted.<sup>26</sup> This percentage had not dropped any by the eighteenth century. Military *philosophes*<sup>27</sup> concluded that *ancien régime* armies were susceptible to desertion because mercenaries, who were often less willing to die for France than a Frenchmen, made up so large a percentage of the army.<sup>28</sup> Instead they proposed that the French soldier should be like Polybius' Roman soldiers – citizens willing and able to “stand their ground and die for their country.”<sup>29</sup>

2. *Lack of Decisiveness*: Early Modern battles were bloody, prolonged, and indecisive affairs. Instead of decisive field battles, commanders were often forced to fight sieges that might

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<sup>25</sup> Jamel Ostwald, *Vauban under Siege: Engineering Efficiency and the Martial Vigor in the War of the Spanish Succession* (Boston: Brill, 2007). Puysegur in his “Art of War” frequently notes the influence which Vauban had on siege warfare and the changes in the tactical system which resulted from Vauban's work. Jacques fr. Chastenet de Puysegur, *Art. de la guerre par principes et par règles*, vol. 1 (Paris: Charles-Antoine Jombert, 1749), 2. 513.

<sup>26</sup> Delbruck, 229.

<sup>27</sup> Starkey, in his “War in the Age of Enlightenment,” uses the term “military *philosophes*” to encompass the tacticians, thinkers, and philosophers who applied themselves to tactical issues. While many, like Saxe and Folard, had served in the military, other contributors to the discussion, like Rousseau, participated from a civilian standpoint. Consequently, this term will be used in this paper as well, as it seems to best reflect the overlap and connection between this military debate and the contemporaneous currents of the Enlightenment. Armstrong Starkey, *War in the Age of Enlightenment, 1700-1789*, ed. Jeremy Black (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Maurice de Saxe, “My Reveries upon the Art of War,” in *Roots of Strategy: A Collection of Military Classics*, ed. Major Thomas R Phillips (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1943), 114.

<sup>29</sup> Polybius, *Histories*, trans. Mortimer Chambers (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1966), 235.

last hours, days, or weeks, and regularly resulted in either pyrrhic victories or costly stalemates.<sup>30</sup> Consequently, going to war was often unproductive and ruinously costly, which was particularly worrisome for the increasingly bankrupt French monarchy.<sup>31</sup>

3. *The lack of a systematic approach*: Despite the work of Vauban at the turn of the century, battles did not produce predictable results; risks, chances, and errors had not been reduced. Warfare, Marshal-General Maurice de Saxe complained, was without “principles and rules,” and needed to be reevaluated in order to produce reliable outcomes, just as any other science might.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, the Marquis de Puysegur complained there was “no school where one can instruct oneself in the military art, no teacher who can teach fundamental rules . . . as if all the arts did not have certain rules and a theory founded on solid principles.”<sup>33</sup>

Under Frederick the Great, the Prussians, who suffered the same three major issues as the French, reformed and restructured their army with considerable success. Yet, despite the Prussians’ rigid and reliable system which had bested the French on several occasions, French thinkers were adamantly opposed to the adoption of Prussian-style tactics. This was the case for a number of reasons. First, *philosophes* were hesitant to adopt a system which did not allow for individual agency and *élan*. Led by Saxe, whose *Reveries sur l’art de guerre* stressed the importance of individuality and morale, military *philosophes* abhorred the rigid discipline and

<sup>30</sup> It is telling that at the turn of the century the Duke of Marlborough, renowned for his decisiveness, fought 30 long and arduous sieges, but only four major battles. Jamel Ostwald, “The ‘Decisive’ Battle of Ramillies, 1706: Prerequisites for Decisiveness in Early Modern Warfare,” *The Journal of Military History* 64, no. 3 (June 2000): 653.

<sup>31</sup> John Landers, “The Destructiveness of Pre-Industrial Warfare: Political and Technological Determinants,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no.4 (Jul. 2005): 456.

<sup>32</sup> Maurice de Saxe, *Memoires sur L’Art de la Guerre* (Paris : George Conrad Walther, 1757), 1; Saxe, “My Reveries,” 100; Irene Amelot de Lacroix, *Rules and regulations for the field exercise and manoeuvres of the French infantry issued August 1, 1791* (Boston: T.B. Watt and Co, 1810), 1.

<sup>33</sup> Puysegur, vol. 1, i.

robotic nature of the Prussian system.<sup>34</sup> Second, French thinkers concluded that the French character was fundamentally different than that of the Germans in that the French were better suited to attack than defence.<sup>35</sup> It was almost unanimously agreed that whatever battlefield system was adopted, it should cater to this uniquely French *élan*. "True valour," Folard proclaimed, "consists not in combats which are made at a distance; but in shock and sudden attacks. That is the only road which brings us to victory."<sup>36</sup> Better the troops advance with only their steel, it was agreed, than attempt to maintain a defensive line. It was generally agreed that the Prussians had perfected their own system anyway, meaning that even if the French did invest time, labour, and money to imitate it, they could at best be comparable to, never better than, the Prussians.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, musket-fire proved to be horribly inaccurate and largely unproductive at the best of times, even under the Prussian and British armies.<sup>38</sup> It seemed futile, therefore, to invest in so inefficient a system. Saxe even predicted that muskets would soon be obsolete: "If the previous war had lasted a little longer, indubitably everyone would have fought hand to hand. This was because the abuse of firing began to be appreciated; it causes more noise than harms, and those who depend on it are always beaten."<sup>39</sup> French thinkers thus began to look for and

<sup>34</sup> Saxe's *Reveries* were published posthumously in 1757. Azar Gat, *The Origins of Military Thought from the Enlightenment to Clausewitz* (Toronto: Clarendon Press, 1989), 38. This feeling permeates French military during the eighteenth century, and appears even as late as the Napoleonic wars in an account from Jean Barrès: "I observe and understand that these troops are drilled in the Prussian manner, but I will soon put a stop to that." Jean-Baptiste Barrès, *Memoirs of a Napoleonic Officer*, ed. Maurice Barrès, trans. Bernard Miall (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1925), 52.

<sup>35</sup> Saxe, "My Reveries," 100; Gat, *Origins*, 38.

<sup>36</sup> Folard, quoted in Robert Sherman Quimby, *The Background of Napoleonic Warfare: The Theory of Military Tactics in Eighteenth-century France* (New York: AMS Press, 1968), 33.

<sup>37</sup> In general, both the British and Prussians relied on line tactics, which emphasized firepower and uniformity. This often involved lines of soldiers two or three deep, firing in unison on command. Gat, *Origins*, 38; Major Thomas R. Phillips, *Roots of Strategy: A Collection of Military Classics* (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1943), 166.

<sup>38</sup> In fact, as few as 0.1-0.05 percent of shots actually hit their intended targets, justifying the French move away from muskets. Baron Lejeune even went so far as to state that the arrows of the Niemen people "would pierce an apple at a distance of a hundred yards more often than our pistol shots could hit a button at twenty-five." Louis-François Lejeune, *Memoirs of Baron Lejeune, Aide-de-camp to Marshals Berthier, Davout, and Oudinot*, ed. and trans. Mrs Arthur Bell (New York: Logmans, Green, and Co., 1897), 71.

<sup>39</sup> Saxe, "My Reveries," 110.

design a different system; a system which they felt would out-fight the British and Prussian armies time and time again.

Opposed to their enemies' tactical systems, yet frustrated by their own, many eighteenth-century French tacticians turned to the armies of antiquity for inspiration. This turn was in fact not unusual. Ultimately, tacticians turned to classical military models because the systems of antiquity could fix all the problems which *philosophes* had outlined with the *ancien régime* army. Greek and Roman warfare appeared successful, decisive, methodical, and, as an added bonus, dignified.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, it relied on massed infantry offensives using deep formations — such as the Greek and Macedonian *phalanxes* — to charge and break the enemy lines. This was just the sort of approach which French soldiers were supposedly ideally suited for. Even better, the soldiers of the hoplite *phalanx*, inspired by their state, did not seem to desert their ranks.<sup>41</sup> Contemporary intellectual trends already strongly encouraged a turn towards antiquity. Steeped in classical literature, the *philosophes* of the Enlightenment have, perhaps rightly, been accused of knowing the history of Greece and Rome better than that of their own state.<sup>42</sup> Inevitably, ideas from the political and social branches of the Enlightenment filtered into military discussions. Calls for a more humane approach to warfare, new political systems which might include a citizen militia instead of a mercenary army, and new social discourse which might encourage more equal battlefield formations evoked regular comparisons to Rome, Sparta, and Athens.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gat, *Origins*, 8; David Bell suggests that the birth and popularity of the novel was in part responsible for this trend by giving readers a new way to identify with the classics. David A. Bell, *The First Total War: Napoleon's Europe and the Birth of Warfare as We Know It* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007), 202.

<sup>41</sup> Saxe, "My Reveries," 145-147.

<sup>42</sup> Bell, 101.

<sup>43</sup> Rousseau is particularly known for this, though Montesquieu and others suggested it as well—consequently, the application of such citizen soldiers to the battlefield by Saxe cannot be seen as out of place or as revolutionary. Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Constitutional Project for Corsica*. Kessinger Press, 5, 36, [http://books.google.ca/books?id=X4kNrHO\\_3fAC&pg=PA5&dq=rousseau+tilling+the+soil&hl=en&ei=DUA2Tan\\_dDoa-sOO-vPDJAQ&sa=X&oi=book\\_result&ct=book-thumbnail&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6wEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.ca/books?id=X4kNrHO_3fAC&pg=PA5&dq=rousseau+tilling+the+soil&hl=en&ei=DUA2Tan_dDoa-sOO-vPDJAQ&sa=X&oi=book_result&ct=book-thumbnail&resnum=1&ved=0CCoQ6wEwAA#v=onepage&q&f=false).

As J.E. Lendon suggests in "The Rhetoric of Combat," the way the Greeks and Romans approached, understood, and therefore wrote about war placed particular emphasis on soldiers' moods and morale. He demonstrates in particular how Caesar emphasized morale and spiritual condition as a deciding factor on the battlefield.<sup>44</sup> Entrenched in such texts, and having grown into the humanist tradition of the Renaissance and Early Modern periods, it is easy to understand how Enlightenment scholars, concerned with the humanity of individuals and the social contract, could easily and quickly identify with the classical approach to warfare.

Consequently, tacticians' investigation of classical military texts, and in particular Folard's *Commentary on Polybius* in which the *ordre profond* was first propagated, did not seem out of place. Indeed, Nathaniel Wolloch claims that the vocabulary used for understanding war was based on a classical understanding of warfare, and necessarily shaped how military *philosophes* understood and expressed warfare.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, military study of the classics was in no way unprecedented in the eighteenth century. Throughout the Renaissance, classical military treatises were the subject of much debate and comparison. Machiavelli begins his *Art of War*, for example, by suggesting that "if we consider the practice and institution observed by the old Romans (whose example I am always fond of recommending), we shall find many things worthy of imitation; these may be easily introduced into any other state."<sup>46</sup> This demonstrated to many tacticians that they were indeed on the right track. Finally, it helped that classical tactical systems were both attainable and inexpensive. Technologies did not need to be invested in, mercenaries did not need to be hired, and little training was required. Instead, the French infantryman, armed with his own spirit and a pike, could decide the result of a war.

<sup>44</sup> J.E. Lendon, "The Rhetoric of Combat: Greek Military Theory and Roman Culture in Julius Caesar's Battle Descriptions," *Classical Antiquity* 18, no. 2 (October 1999): 281-282, 293.

<sup>45</sup> Nathaniel Wolloch, "Cato the Younger in the Enlightenment," *Modern Philology* 106, no.1 (Aug. 2008): 6.

<sup>46</sup> Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Art of War*, trans. Ellis Farnsworth (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company Inc, 1965), 12.

It is important to insert a brief clarification in the discussion at this point. While military *philosophes* constructed a tactical system using information from antiquity, their conclusions were not always accurate. David Larmour makes a compelling argument that the Revolutionary Government “re-membered” antiquity in order to fit it to their own needs and ideals.<sup>47</sup> The same might be said of the development of the *ordre profond*, as military *philosophes* exaggerated and blurred the reality of classical battlefields. For example, the canonical writings of Polybius and Vegetius held in common that they were written about ideal Roman tactical systems, not actual tactical systems. This little-mentioned detail means that the military *philosophes* based their arguments on Roman legions which never actually existed, just as Machiavelli had done two-hundred years before them.<sup>48</sup> Furthermore, ancient authors like Caesar had a vested interest in making their battles appear both humane and decisive, yet in reality this was often not the case. Therefore it should be kept in mind what the military *philosophes* thought and what was actually the case are two different things. In fact, in many cases, the realities which eighteenth-century tacticians and the instructions which classical authors provided were two very opposite things. For example, Vegetius recommended that “every plan . . . is to be considered, every expedient tried, and every method taken” before battle was accepted, and if it was, “Good officers [would] decline general engagements where the danger is common, and prefer the employment of stratagem and finesse to destroy the enemy as much as possible in detail and intimidate them without exposing [their] own forces.”<sup>49</sup> However, military *philosophes* were looking for system

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(continued from above) David H.J. Larmour, “History Recreated or Malfunctioned Desire? The Roman Republic Re-Membered in the French Revolution,” *The French Revolution in Culture and Society*, ed. David G. Troyansky, Alfred Cismaru, and Norwood Andrews, Jr (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991).

<sup>48</sup> Oliver L. Spaulding Jr., “The Ancient Military Writers,” *Classical Journal* 28, no.9 (June 1933): 666.

<sup>49</sup> Vegetius, “The Military Institutions of Rome,” in *Roots of Strategy: A Collection of Military Classics*, ed. Major Thomas R Phillips (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1943), 76, 38.

to prevent this exact, indecisive approach. However, tacticians were willing to overlook such discrepancies in their effort to 're-member' antiquity.

Classical tactical systems were easily integrated into eighteenth-century warfare by military *philosophes*. While the reader may question how a *phalanx* armed with pikes could function against an eighteenth-century enemy armed with muskets, French *philosophes* were not as sceptical. Though the pike had been phased out at the beginning of the seventeenth century, many believed that warfare contained unchangeable and eternal rules, and therefore that technological change did not alter the fundamental nature of warfare.<sup>50</sup> Tactician Joly de Maizeroy, for example, states:

No change could affect the universal fundamentals of the art of war: Though the invention of powder and of new arms have occasioned various changes in the mechanism of war, we are not to believe that it has had any great influence on the fundamental part of that science, nor on the great manoeuvres. The art of directing the great operations is still the same.<sup>51</sup>

These universal principles dictated that the offensive position should always be sought; that battle must be presented when possible, for "it is a paradox to hope to win without fighting;"<sup>52</sup> that depth was the key factor for success in infantry formations; that a small, disciplined group of soldiers acting together would overcome greater numbers; and that warfare could be perfected through theory, not necessarily by practice.<sup>53</sup> These lessons were supposed to be applicable regardless of time or place. Accordingly, even the introduction of firearms could not alter the nature of the battlefield.<sup>54</sup> The poor accuracy and limited power of muskets during the eighteenth

<sup>50</sup> Delbruck, 177.

<sup>51</sup> Maizeroy, quoted in Gat, *Origins*, 40. The concept of Universal Principles will be returned to in the analysis of Jomini later in this study.

<sup>52</sup> Memoirs de Montecuculli, quoted in Guillaume Le Blond, "Guerre," *L'Encyclopedie*.  
<http://encyclopedie.uchicago.edu/>.

<sup>53</sup> Le Blond, "Guerre;" Lancelot Turpin de Crissé, *Commentaires sur les Memoires de Montecuculi, Generissime des Armees, & Grand-Maitre de l'Artillerie de l'Empereur* (Paris: Chez Lacombe, 1769), xi.

<sup>54</sup> Indeed, Puysegur argued that there could be no greater mistake than to assume that the introduction of firearms changed the nature of war. Instead, he claimed, the success of all the great generals was a result of their adherence to



century did little to contest this theory. Thus, despite some resistance, which will be discussed shortly, a large number of tacticians felt that a system which relied on depth, a quick offensive burst, and a small group of disciplined and cohesive soldiers, would be as successful on the eighteenth-century battlefield as it had been in antiquity, and set about designing it.

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the universal rules of war, and recommended looking not only to Montecuculi and Turenne for proof, but to Arrian's *Campaigns of Alexander*, Thucydides' *History of the Peloponesian War*, the *Commentaries* of Caesar, and to Polybius and Xenophon. Puysegur, vol.1, 4-5.

### *III. The Solution*

French tacticians drew from antiquity one key system: the *ordre profond* (the deep order). The *ordre profond* was based on the examples of both the Greek *phalanx* and the Roman legions, combining elements of both into a large, deep column formation. This stood in opposition to the *ordre mince*, or line formation. Though the *ordre profond* had a number of different forms and went through a number of different stages, in principle it relied on its depth and mass to advance quickly and break the thin line of enemy troops.<sup>55</sup> Generally speaking, the *ordre profond* was as dense as possible, usually consisting of anywhere between 200 and 2000 soldiers, all tightly packed. Given their faith in the universal principles of war mentioned above, many commanders were confident that even a small number of troops employed correctly could deliver the necessary decisive blow at the opportune moment. By 1791, the column had been outlined in the *Règlement* of the field army, and instructions were given for every manoeuvre and procedure which a soldier in column would be required to know.<sup>56</sup> Therefore, despite their many

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<sup>55</sup> Quimby, 27.

<sup>56</sup> Lacroix, xli. The *Règlement*, also called the *Ordinance*, is cited in this bibliography as the *Rules and regulations for the field exercise and manoeuvres of the French infantry*, written by Lacroix, as the copy used is a translated and re-published copy. However, it will be referred to as the *Règlement* in the text in order to remain consistent with other scholarship.

differences, proponents of the *ordre profond* agreed that, for the following reasons, the *ordre* would lead French armies to victory.

Foremost, the *ordre profond* was an ideal solution for the *ancien régime* armies because it could allow a quick and decisive attack. While the seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries had been plagued by slow and destructive sieges and long and expensive campaigns which often amounted to very little, the *ordre profond* promised an end to such stalemates. Based on the experiences of the Seven Years' War, Henry Lloyd concluded that battles were inconclusive, stating that "no kingdom is overturned – no nation is enslaved" by the recent wars.<sup>57</sup> By breaking the enemy line swiftly while on the field, the *ordre profond* would ideally force a retreat or surrender, and save the attacker from continuing a long campaign or besieging enemy strongholds. Saxe, for example, suggested that if the column could force a retreat, a commander could capitalize on the enemy's sudden weakness even against greater numbers: "The pursuit should be pushed to the limit. And the retreat which had appeared such a satisfactory solution will be turned into a rout. A detachment of ten thousand men can destroy an army of one hundred thousand in flight."<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, deploying into an attacking column from the march was theoretically much faster than deploying into line, and could therefore save hours of pre-battle preparation.<sup>59</sup> As a result, battle was much easier to force upon an enemy.<sup>60</sup> Previously, an unwilling enemy could avoid battle by not presenting an attacker with time and space to deploy troops into line, gaining time to regroup his own army and wait for reinforcements, and forcing the attackers to lose their advantage. However, the *ordre profond* required less time and space, and could consequently force battle whenever conditions were favourable. When battle was

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<sup>57</sup> Lloyd, quoted in Starkey, 57.

<sup>58</sup> Saxe, "My Reveries," 161.

<sup>59</sup> Phillips, 219.

<sup>60</sup> Ostwald, "The 'Decisive' Battle of Ramillies," 662.

presented, proceeding across the battlefield in column would save time and confusion by allowing troops to navigate around obstacles and terrain quickly and efficiently, a problem which had plagued the *ordre mince*.<sup>61</sup> In making battle swift, the tacticians hoped the *ordre profond* would also make it conclusive. Therefore, tacticians and *philosophes* hoped that the column would decide not only the day, but the entire campaign. By reducing war to a single battle, warfare would be less expensive, less destructive, more humane and, most importantly, successful.

Second, the *ordre profond* was proposed as a solution to desertion problems. It was largely agreed that the *ordre mince* provided too much space for indecision and panic, especially in troops that did not have the robotic constitution of the Prussian or British line soldiers. A battlefield which could extend upwards of six miles simply did not allow for enough supervision to effectively counter desertion.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, the long and drawn out waits during the battle for deployment, positioning, and repositioning allowed soldiers hours to reconsider their decision to forfeit their lives; far too many found the time to decide against such a course of action. The *ordre profond*, on the other hand, would not be plagued by these problems. By grouping troops in a confined mass, soldiers would be held together and propelled by the momentum of the soldiers beside, behind, and in front of them.<sup>63</sup> Folard argued that only those in the front of the column would be susceptible to panic, yet these soldiers would be forced forward by those behind them. The soldier in the back ranks, on the other hand, would be unable to see the enemy and be encouraged by the forward motion of those ahead.<sup>64</sup> Propelled by the swift

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<sup>61</sup> Griffith suggests that in order to cross the battlefield in line, troops would frequently have to break down into a column to bypass obstacles, then reform line, disrupting the momentum of the advance greatly. Furthermore, he states, the job of maintaining an organized line over what could easily be a 6-mile long front was a "staff officer's nightmare," and offered little mobility. Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 6-7.

<sup>62</sup> Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>64</sup> Folard, in Quimby, 30.

action and momentum of the column, soldiers would not have the time to reconsider, a vital step in countering panic.<sup>65</sup> Caught in the swift momentum of battle, soldiers would charge towards the enemy before they had the time to think twice. Meanwhile, swift and decisive victories would prevent battlefield panic and horrors, giving the soldiers far less reason to desert.

Third, the *ordre profond* was also preferable in that it avoided the need for any excessive use of firearms. Muskets, as mentioned, were slow to reload, cumbersome, and inaccurate. Furthermore, the thick white smoke clouds from the gunpowder blurred troops' vision, and it was often necessary to either fire blindly or to wait for the smoke to clear.<sup>66</sup> Many went so far as to blame the French losses in the Seven Years' War entirely on firearms.<sup>67</sup> Tacticians argued that the French character – specifically the Frenchman's passion for and skill on the offensive – would more than make up for a loss of firepower.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, what the column lost in firepower it made up for with cold steel, or *arme blanche*. Even Voltaire suggested that “the fire of the French is . . . usually inferior to that of other nations;” yet “the French nation attacks with the greatest impetuosity . . . it is very difficult to resist its shock.”<sup>69</sup> Lazare Carnot, a Revolutionary-era Minister of War, argued that *arme blanche* “has always been more brilliant, more efficacious, and more protracted than the defence with firearms.”<sup>70</sup> The fast pace attack which the *ordre profond* allowed would reduce the amount of time troops spent under enemy

<sup>65</sup> Accordingly, Frederick the Great claimed that “If my soldiers began to think, not one would remain in the ranks.” Frederick, quoted in John Levi Martin, “The Objective and Subjective Rationalization of War,” *Theory and Society* 34, no.3 (Sept. 2005): 234.

<sup>66</sup> Saxe, “My Reveries,” 110.

<sup>67</sup> Ken Alder, *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France, 1763-1815* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 35.

<sup>68</sup> Saxe, “My Reveries,” 145.

<sup>69</sup> Voltaire, quoted in Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 187.

<sup>70</sup> It is important to note here that Frederick the Great did not agree with this. Despite initial writings agreeing with limiting the role of firearms in battle, Frederick later concluded that ‘to attack the enemy without procuring oneself the advantage of superior, or at least equal fire, is to wish to fight against an armed troop with clubs, and this is impossible.’ Frederick, quoted in Phillips, 165; Lazare Carnot, *A Treatise on the Defence of Fortified Places, written under the direction and published by the Command of Buonaparte for the Instruction and Guidance of the Officers of the French Army*, trans. Lt.-Col. Baron de Montalembert (London: Whitehall Military Library, 1814), 93.

fire, and thereby reduce the need to fire back. Armed with bayonets or pikes, soldiers would pierce enemy ranks quickly and efficiently. Thus, the *ordre profond* worked on a strategic level while at the same time better fit with the spirit and *élan* of the independent, creative, and courageous French character.<sup>71</sup> Not only would the soldier be in a better position tactically, but he would be more inspired, more motivated, and more comfortable with the work of his own steel.

Ideologically, the *ordre profond* fit perfectly with the intellectual trends of the mid- to late-eighteenth century. *Philosophes* as well-respected as Rousseau and Montesquieu were calling for a citizen's army to replace the costly standing armies of the *ancien régime* and their mercenary units.<sup>72</sup> In the hope that a few ideologically charged soldiers would be more effective than a mass of mercenaries, *philosophes* advocated the use of tactics which would rely less on training and discipline and more on passion and spirit.<sup>73</sup> The *ordre profond* was perfect.

Required only to drive forward in a group and then use a bayonet, soldiers using the *ordre profond* needed little background knowledge or training, and could therefore be comprised of volunteers or conscripts. Saxe's design for a system of universal conscription was supported by a

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<sup>71</sup> This idea continued just as strongly into the Revolutionary wars (Marshal MacDonald claiming quite blatantly that "the French character lends itself better to attack than defense. Jacques MacDonald, *Recollections of Marshal Macdonald, Duke of Tarentum*, ed. Camille Rousset, trans. Stephen Louis Simeon (London: Richard Bentley and Son, 1893), 103); It is not surprising then, that by the Revolutionary Period, the bayonet was so celebrated that, Lynn suggests, it was a "revolutionary symbol to rival the red liberty cap and the tricolor cockade" which "evoked images of citizen-soldiers braving death at close quarters to defend the Patrie. Like a Crusader's cross," Lynn notes, "it seemed to insure victory by its very presence." Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 188-189.

<sup>72</sup> Starkey, 19-20.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9; While Rousseau argued that mercenaries were a leading cause of the collapse of the Roman Empire, Voltaire referred to mercenary groups as "regiments of murderers," considering them trained killers. Voltaire, quoted in Starkey, 21-22; Instead, based on a Spartan model, Rousseau recommended that soldiers be citizen-militia, raised in the countryside: "Tilling the soil makes men patient and robust which is needed to make good soldiers. Those recruited from the cities are flabby and mutinous; they cannot bear the fatigues of war; they break down under the strain of marching; they are consumed by illnesses; they fight among themselves and fly before the enemy. Trained militia are the best and most reliable troops; the true education of a soldier is to work on a farm." Rousseau, 5; Instead of mercenaries, Rousseau concluded, "each citizen should be a soldier by duty, none by profession." Rousseau, quoted in Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 185. And, as Frederick the Great had already concluded, mercenaries were usually first to desert, meaning that the French armies were well rid of them. Frederick the Great, "Military Instructions for the Generals," in *Roots of Strategy: A Collection of Military Classics*, ed. Major Thomas R Phillips (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, 1943), 165.

number of Enlightenment figures, including future Minister of War Joseph Servan.<sup>74</sup> This potential gave the *ordre profond* support by Enlightenment thinkers as prestigious as Rousseau and Voltaire, lending credibility to the entire discipline.

On a purely practical level, that the column could be made up of troops with little training reduced financial pressures of war. Training troops to hold a march in line, to fire muskets in lines, and to charge an enemy slowly in line was time consuming and thereby costly. Reducing the time spent training troops meant that the expenses of war could be dramatically reduced.<sup>75</sup> Thus, the advocates of citizen soldiers within the *ordre profond* had very practical purposes. Like the social and political Enlightenment, military *philosophes* were essentially conservative minded. Though notions of citizen soldiers and volunteer armies sound revolutionary, most supporters were moved by the practical cost-saving aspects of the *ordre profond*. Contrary to claims that the *ordre profond* was a revolutionary movement ahead of its time and therefore not realised until the revolutionary period, the financial aspects of the *ordre profond* helped to keep it very much grounded in the *ancien régime*. Starkey concludes that despite all their appeals to humanity and change, the “principle focus of these writers was military effectiveness.”<sup>76</sup> Led by the desire to *change* the standing order, and not to uproot it, military *philosophes* remained conservative in nature, just like their political and social counterparts.

Finally, the *ordre profond* was appealing simply for the fact that it was a geometric system. *Ancien régime* tacticians and commanders, particularly during the eighteenth century, were very attached to linear and geometric systems, and the *ordre profond* did not stray from

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<sup>74</sup> Saxe, “My Reveries,” 122; In 1780 Servan published *The Citizen Soldier*, a thesis calling for a system of universal conscription. Lynn, *Battle: A History of Combat and Culture*, 186.

<sup>75</sup> Turpin, 309.

<sup>76</sup> Starkey, 8-9.

these traditions.<sup>77</sup> The desire to maintain orderly and systematic battlefields was the foremost cause of this attraction to geometric systems. Such linearity evoked authority, control, discipline and order, and in this way appealed as much to the theorist as they did the general.<sup>78</sup> Though a seemingly shallow motive, such an appearance could serve to demoralize an opponent, especially an unorganized one.<sup>79</sup> However, deeper cultural feelings were also perhaps behind the desire to maintain geometric formations. Even briefly skimming the texts of Vegetius or Polybius inspires a deep sense of the importance of geometric formations on and off the battlefield. Geometric systems were a fundamental part of how the *ancien régime* commander or tactician felt war ought to be fought, at least according to the universal principles of war. Thus, along with the number of reasons why *ancien régime* commanders and tacticians felt that the *ordre profond* was both acceptable ideologically and ideal in a practical sense, perhaps equally important was that the *ordre profond* was simply the right shape.

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<sup>77</sup> John France, "Close Order and Close Quarter: The Culture of Combat in the West," *The International History Review* 27, no. 3 (September 2007): 498.

<sup>78</sup> Martin, 241.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 251; In this, *philosophes* were likely supported by Arrian's accounts of Alexander's military effectiveness through his use of the Macedonian *pezhetairoi phalanx*, which on one occasion, Arrian reports, was able to cause an enemy to retreat from the battlefield simply by manoeuvring and performing extremely well-executed drills. Arrian, *The Campaigns of Alexander*, ed. and trans. Aubrey de Selincourt (London: Penguin, 1971), 52.



## *IV. Decades of Debate*

In the above, I have stressed that the *ordre profond* was not a radically-conceived or under-supported movement. Instead, deep-order tactics were designed to have practical outcomes for the *ancien régime* armies, and gained the support of a wide audience. Yet despite this support, the *ordre profond* was not immediately incorporated into the French tactical canon. Instead, as will now be examined, the idea underwent decades of debate. Opposition to the *ordre profond* was not usually ideologically based, as is sometimes alleged.<sup>80</sup> Well-versed in military scholarship, tacticians expressed a number of practical concerns with the *ordre profond*.<sup>81</sup> These concerns were widely shared and expressed. Recent scholarship by Sandra Powers has demonstrated the presence of a wide circle of book-sharing between European and American military *philosophes*, including copies and annotations of authors varied from Polybius to Vegetius, and Folard to Frederick. A copy of Drummond de Melfort's *Traite sur la Cavalerie*, for example, was annotated by and passed between the Duc d'Orleans (advocate of the *ordre profond*), Marshal Castries, Montmorency-Laval, Lauzun, Rochambeau, and George

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<sup>80</sup> James R. Arnold, "A Reappraisal of the Column versus the Line in the Peninsular War," *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 537.

<sup>81</sup> Starkey, 212; Powers, 787-788.

Washington.<sup>82</sup> Consequently, the *ordre profond* was a well-known point of contention in France's academic and military circles, and was debated on an accordingly large scale.

Even during its infancy, the *ordre profond* was reasonably high-profile. Though initially confined to theory, the *ordre profond's* first major proponents, Jean Charles Chevalier de Folard and Maurice de Saxe, were both extremely influential. Not only were they major military figures in France during their lifetimes, but their publications received a great deal of posthumous attention. The system began with Folard, who published his *Nouvelles D'écouvertes sur la guerre dans une dissertation de Polybe* in 1724. In it, Folard proposed a 24-30 man wide by 46 man deep column to be used on the battlefield in every circumstance.<sup>83</sup> He suggested that the "manner of fighting by column is . . . superior to all others," and that France's battalions knew "neither how to attack nor defend themselves . . . because they [fought] on so little depth that they [could] easily be pierced and broken."<sup>84</sup> Claiming that depth would maintain French morale while dashing the enemy lines, Folard took specifically from Polybius' doubled phalanx, even claiming to have improved upon it.<sup>85</sup> He believed that deep-order formations promoted the ultimate solidarity between soldiers, and rejected the notion that firearms could or would break troops in column formation, stating that it was "morally impossible that a column could ever be broken."<sup>86</sup> Most, including Saxe, agreed that Folard went "too far," particularly in his claim that "all ground is proper" for the column.<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, even Frederick the Great encouraged all

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 788; Powers also notes that between 1770-1772, the *Encyclopedie Militaire*, a journal devoted to the military debates of the time, was widely popular in Paris, and devoted particular attention to the works and achievements of authors and generals such as Saxe, Folard, Montecuccoli, and Frederick. *Ibid.*, 783.

<sup>83</sup> Quimby, 28, 31.

<sup>84</sup> Folard, quoted in Quimby, 30.

<sup>85</sup> Folard specifically stated that the column "has the solidity and the impulsion of the doubled phalanx, of which Polybius speaks, without having its weaknesses." Jean-Charles de Folard, *Nouvelles d'écouvertes sur la guerre dans une dissertation sur Polybe* (Paris: Jean-Francois Josse, 1726), 200.

<sup>86</sup> Folard, quoted in Quimby, 30.

<sup>87</sup> Saxe, *Memoires sur L'Art de la Guerre*, 3; Folard, 200.

his officers to read Folard, though notably he informed them it contained “diamonds in a dung heap.”<sup>88</sup>

Better known than Folard is Maurice de Saxe. Friendly with Voltaire and well known by the French and Russian monarchs, Saxe was France’s hero of the War of Austrian Succession, winning victories at Fontenoy and Maastricht, among others.<sup>89</sup> Saxe’s support for the *ordre profond* was published in his *Reveries, or Memoires sur l’art de guerre*, and read not only in France, but throughout Europe. His proposed system differed slightly from that of Folard’s, though he accepted Folard’s system both as generally feasible and as commendable.<sup>90</sup> The column, Saxe suggested, should be designed according to the Roman legionary standards, with smaller battalion sizes and deeper formations, as opposed to the Greek-style phalanx which Folard had suggested.<sup>91</sup> As columns necessitated extremely high discipline, Saxe presumed, he proposed to keep soldiers in their vital formation by means of a cadenced march.<sup>92</sup> This discipline would compensate for unpredictable troop morale by keeping soldiers together and in line, something he felt Folard had not fully taken into account.<sup>93</sup> Saxe recognized that the column could not act alone, and advocated a use of mixed arms, in particular cavalry to support the *ordre profond*.<sup>94</sup> Finally, he agreed with Folard that it was the nature of the French to attack, and

<sup>88</sup> Frederick the Great, quoted in Quimby, 40.

<sup>89</sup> Phillips, 97-98.

<sup>90</sup> Saxe, *Memoires sur L’Art de la Guerre*, 3-4.

<sup>91</sup> Saxe, “My Reveries,” 148-149.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 109, 122.

<sup>93</sup> Saxe criticised Folard, stating “He supposes all men to be brace at all times and does not realize that the courage of troops must be reborn daily, that nothing is so variable, and that the true skill of a general consists in knowing how to guarantee it by his dispositions, his positions, and those traits of genius that characterize great captains. The same troops, who if attacking would have been victorious, may be invariably defeated in entrenchments. Few men have accounted for it in a reasonable manner, for it lies in human hearts and one should search for it there.” (Il suppose toujours les hommes braves, sans faire attention que la valeur des troupes est journalière, que rien n’est si variable, & que la vraie habileté d’un General consiste à savoir s’en garantir par les dispositions, par les positions, & par ces traits de lumières qui caractérisent les grands Capitaines.) *Ibid.*, 100-101; Saxe, *Memoires sur L’Art de la Guerre*, 3-4.

<sup>94</sup> Saxe, “My Reveries,” 126.

controversially advocated the use of pikes instead of gunpowder weapons within the *ordre profond*.<sup>95</sup> Saxe condemned firearms specifically because of their lack of accuracy and power:

Powder is not as terrible as believed. Few men, in these affairs, are killed from in front or fighting. I have seen entire salvos fail to kill four men. And I have never seen, and neither has anyone else, I believe, a single discharge do enough violence to keep the troops from continuing forward and avenging themselves with bayonet and shot at close quarters.<sup>96</sup>

Though this particular suggestion met considerable criticism, in general, Saxe was widely influential. His outright support for the deep-order tactical system was dispersed and debated by tacticians as well as by monarchs. With the groundwork for the *ordre profond* complete, the fate of the system rested with the military and academic community.

Thirty years after Folard's first publication, his *ordre* found another ardent disciple: Francois-Jean de Mesnil-Durand, a French tactician who published his *Projet d'un ordre françois en tactique* in support of the *ordre profond* in 1755. It was through the work of Mensil-Durand that the *ordre profond* finally became a reality of the field. Based on Folard and Saxe's precedent, Mesnil-Durand agreed that troops in column must not fire, but rely instead on the spirit of the system.<sup>97</sup> He proposed a system of deployment from and into column which would speed and simplify the process, allowing commanders to focus on his five principles of attack: superiority of numbers at the point of attack, concealment of the attack until the last moment, reliance on a vigorous charge and not on fire, concentration of attack to one point, and attack upon the centre.<sup>98</sup> Additionally, Mesnil-Durand answered critics of the *ordre profond* by

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<sup>95</sup> See page 10; Saxe recommended 13 foot pikes and shields, justifying this decision with the confidence it would inspire in the French character: "According to my formation all the men are covered, each by each other, with reciprocal confidence; the front presents a forest of spears; their appearance is formidable and gives confidence to your own troops because they feel its power." *Ibid.*, 116-117.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

<sup>97</sup> Quimby, 211-212. Unable to find translated versions of Mesnil-Durand's works, I rely upon extensive passages quoted by Quimby, Alder, and Colin, noting the bias which this may bring.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 220. These notably aligned very closely with the universal principles of war which the Ancients advocated, discussed above.

publishing geometric proofs which he claimed demonstrated that the column was not only feasible, but ultimately a superior method to the *ordre mince*. Mesnil-Durand algebraically calculated that the column could maintain a superior level of accuracy and rate of fire while moving faster than line orders.<sup>99</sup> More importantly, he calculated that under fire, the column would lose *fewer* soldiers than the *ordre mince*, solving a major criticism of the *ordre*.<sup>100</sup> Though his proofs met some opposition, Mesnil-Durand won the favour of France's top commander, Victor-Francois de Broglie, and the interest of the king, pushing the *ordre profond* closer to inclusion in the tactical canon.<sup>101</sup>

Mesnil-Durand was not the only reason the *ordre profond* gained ground in the mid-eighteenth century. The successful use of similar military systems by armies which the French had recently come into contact with suggested that deep-order tactical systems could be fruitfully employed. Infantry columns were being used with success in Russia. Due to the flat terrain and heavy presence of cavalry on Russian battlefields, especially in south-eastern Europe, Russian infantry successfully relied on square and column formations.<sup>102</sup> More significant, the American Revolution had demonstrated the power of free and motivated soldiers. On a tactical level, commanders in America – including LaFayette – found that small groups of fast moving and excited soldiers could win a battle, and consequently included infantry columns in their repertoire to house such soldiers.<sup>103</sup> It seemed to the French that the Americans were successfully employing the universal principles of warfare on the modern battlefield.<sup>104</sup> Finally, French losses

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<sup>99</sup> Alder, 115.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>101</sup> Quimby, 233.

<sup>102</sup> Starkey, 179.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 23. John Lynn, *Battle*, 186; Marie Joseph Paul Yves Roch Gilbert Du Motier Lafayette, *Memoirs, Correspondence, and Manuscripts of General Lafayette, Published by his Family*, vol. 1 (New York: Saunders and Otley, 1836), 236.

<sup>104</sup> Julia Osman, "Ancient Warriors on Modern Soil: French Military Reform and American Military Images in Eighteenth-Century France." *French History* 22, no. 2 (2008): 187.

in the Seven Years War prompted a call for change within the army.<sup>105</sup> Riding this discontent, by 1778 Mesnil-Durand and Broglie had won enough support for the *ordre profond* to put it to the test.

Testing the *ordre profond* was by no means an easy task. In 1778, after France's entrance into the American Revolutionary War, top military officials from throughout France were invited by Broglie and Mensil-Durand to view *ordre profond* manoeuvres by troops trained by Mesnil-Durand himself.<sup>106</sup> Days were spent watching as forty-four battalions of soldiers deployed from line to column, marched in column, charged lines, and other such drills.<sup>107</sup> However even after all the tests had been completed the *ordre profond* remained contentious. While its supporters, the "Ancients," claimed the tests demonstrated its superiority, opponents, the "Moderns,"<sup>108</sup> were even more convinced that the *ordre profond* was unsuitable.<sup>109</sup> Perhaps the largest contention was over the method of testing. Unable to fire on each other, French soldiers could hardly demonstrate what the Moderns needed to be convinced of most: that the column could stand up to enemy fire as well as the line.<sup>110</sup> Convinced or not, it is notable that fourteen years before the French Revolution, and nearly twenty years before the Revolutionary Armies went to war, the *ordre profond* was being tested. Despite the contention, had the French been at war on the continent between 1775 and 1789, it seems likely that the battlefield would have been the testing

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<sup>105</sup> Avant, 54.

<sup>106</sup> Alder, 114; Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 8; Quimby, 233-248.

<sup>107</sup> Jean Lambert Alphonse Colin, *L'Infanterie au XVIIIe siècle: La Tactique* (Harvard: Berger-Levrault, 1907), <[http://pfeffree.fr/Anc\\_Reg/Art\\_Mili/Colin/Colin\\_Tactique.pdf](http://pfeffree.fr/Anc_Reg/Art_Mili/Colin/Colin_Tactique.pdf)>, 134.

<sup>108</sup> These terms, "Ancients" and "Moderns" are used by Ken Alder in his *Engineering the Revolution: Arms and Enlightenment in France*, and will be used in this study accordingly.

<sup>109</sup> One observer argued: "Nothing of all that which had been prescribed had been well and exactly executed. Moreover, the ground had been badly estimated; joined to which there had been many errors in the commands, and that day presented no matter for instruction. It added, on the contrary, the prejudice which one already had against these new manoeuvres." Wimpfen, quoted in Quimby, 236.

<sup>110</sup> Wimpfen estimated that "in the time that would have been necessary for these columns, marching at the most rapid manoeuvre pace, to arrive at the range of charging with the bayonet . . . each [enemy] gun would easily have been able to fire 50 shots, and there would have followed likewise a total destruction of these formidable columns, which probably would have sought their safety in flight." Wimpfen, quoted in Quimby, 240.

place for the *ordre profond*. Yet, France would not be at war on the continent again until 1792, leaving the *ordre profond* on the sidelines for the time being.

As proponents of the *ordre profond* made a stronger and stronger case for their system, their opponents, the Moderns, took an equally strong stand against it. Opposition to the column was not based on worries about citizen soldiers, individuality, or noble rights, but boiled down to a key difference: the Moderns did not consider that universal rules of war were applicable on the modern battlefield. They suggested instead that the field of war was changing according to technological factors, and therefore technology would dictate the shape of the battlefield.<sup>111</sup> Modernist du Coudray responded to Mesnil-Durand's geometric proofs, stating the shift over the past century from three-deep to two-deep lines spoke for itself.<sup>112</sup> Citing Prussian successes following their switch to a two-deep line, Coudray suggested that because of the recent advances in firepower, depth was no longer an important principle on the battlefield.<sup>113</sup> In response to Mesnil-Durand's system, Coudray produced his own proofs demonstrating the vulnerability of the deep order formation in the face of musket fire from enemy lines.<sup>114</sup> Though he exaggerated by predicting that 144% of the troops advancing in column would be killed by enemy fire, his proofs were enough to turn many against adopting the *ordre profond*.<sup>115</sup> Although Coudray himself died in 1777 while volunteering in the American Revolution, his arguments found a great deal of support following the 1778 demonstrations.

In support of Coudray's argument, the contest over artillery systems which had been ongoing in France for roughly forty years had finally reached a consensus. Ken Alder's *Engineering the Revolution*, upon which I rely in this section, provides a particularly thorough

<sup>111</sup> Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 8; Alder, 112.

<sup>112</sup> Alder, 112.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibidem*.

analysis of the French artillery debates during this period. Accordingly to Alder, France's old Vallière artillery system was heavy and slow, designed for maximum impact and siege. Many favoured a replacement of this system with the Austrian-inspired Gribeauval system of light, manoeuvrable, and extremely mobile artillery.<sup>116</sup> Tactically, the Gribeauval system meant that even surprise attacks and swift charges could be countered by repositionable artillery.<sup>117</sup> Frederick the Great had already revolutionized artillery systems upon his introduction of horse artillery, which again allowed swift and repositionable cannon; the Gribeauval system applied these principles to the construction of cannons. Though slow to adopt these artillery systems for a number of reasons, the French military was fully aware that the new artillery systems severely threatened deep-order formations.<sup>118</sup> Light and adjustable artillery meant that the *ordre profond* lost the advantages of speed and shock.<sup>119</sup> This development, more than anything else, held the *ordre profond* from being officially adopted. Despite its speed and power, most agreed that the new fast, manoeuvrable, and repositionable artillery would make quick work of a relatively undefended column.

In 1778, largely due to the artillery developments, supporters of the *ordre profond* worked towards a middle ground. In this process they were led by Jacques-Antoine-Hippolyte, Comte de Guibert. Guibert became extremely influential for his proposed tactical system which unified all the military systems, including the *ordre profond*, into one code.<sup>120</sup> By providing a universal, systematic approach to battle, Guibert appeased the great majority of French tacticians and

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<sup>116</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 205; This system of artillery became a hallmark of Napoleonic tactics, described in detail by du Teil, who outlined that artillery must be light enough that it could keep pace with the infantry in order to be effectively brought to bear on the "key points which must decide the victory." du Teil, quoted in Alder, 44.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>118</sup> Alder, 41.

<sup>119</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 205-206.

<sup>120</sup> Alder, 53.



*philosophes*.<sup>121</sup> Simply recognizing that the column could be useful in a number of circumstances, while the line was useful in others, Guibert outlined how and when best to use one or the other.<sup>122</sup> This mixed order theoretically ensured that commanders could adapt and adjust on the battlefield, working according to their own preferences and employing formations at their discretion. Additionally, flexible infantry systems complemented the Gribeauval artillery, maximizing the artillery's advantage of manoeuvrability.<sup>123</sup> Guibert's *ordre mixte* formed the basis of French infantry procedures following 1778. Though this system was not codified until 1791, the *ordre profond* as a component of the *ordre mixte* was accepted by the *philosophes* and military communities as an integral system for French infantry.

When war began in 1792, Revolutionary commanders, trained in the military schools of the *ancien régime* prior to the Revolution, used the Guibert-based instructions of the *Règlement*.<sup>124</sup> Thus, the *ordre profond* was not a revolutionary new adoption with which Republican France went to war, but part of the complex military system which had been developing throughout the eighteenth century. On the eve of the French Revolution, opinion was still mixed about just how effective the *ordre profond* would be on a real battlefield. But when tactical procedures were codified in 1791, the inclusion of the *ordre profond* in French battlefield procedure was not a sudden change of heart or a revolutionary shift, but a reflection of general consensus. While it is

<sup>121</sup> Unfortunately, without a translated copy of Guibert's work, I rely on secondary material in my inclusion of Guibert, and will therefore not attempt to analyse his contributions in any specific detail.

<sup>122</sup> Many cite this system as influential for Napoleon – certainly, it is undoubtable that Guibert must have had some influence on Napoleon. Whether the *ordre mixte* exactly as Guibert recommended it was put to use in the Napoleonic Wars, however, seems unlikely. As Giffith suggests, the actual contributions of the *ordre mixte* to Napoleonic tactics have been overestimated. Instead, he supposes, it is more likely that in many cases commanders were simply employing different and overlapping tactics, not systematically employing a mixed order. Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 219.

<sup>123</sup> Rory Muir, *Tactics and the Experience of Battle in the Age of Napoleon* (London: Yale University Press, 2000), 72.

<sup>124</sup> Giffith notes that the success of Revolutionary armies is often attributed to the youth of its commanders, yet points out that the average general rose to command in his mid-forties, demonstrating that the generals of the revolution would have been educated under the *ancien régime* schools. Many of these generals would have been in school – and likely been at least aware of – during the tests by Broglie and Mesnil-Durand, the publishing of Guibert, and the American Revolutionary War. Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 122-124.

true that the *ordre profond* faced opposition under the *ancien régime*, this opposition was of a practical sort, not ideological. If Revolutionaries did adopt *ordre profond* specifically because it faced opposition under the *ancien régime* as has been suggested,<sup>125</sup> then they very seriously misunderstood the debates of the past fifty years. For, as Revolutionaries would soon find out, this practical opposition was well founded.

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<sup>125</sup> "Ideological fantasy clearly favoured the column attack with cold steel, rather than the evolutions in line to give fire as described in the *Règlement*. If old military professionals preferred the latter, that seemed reason enough to many civilian demagogues to favour the former." Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 13-14.

## V. *The Ordre Profond in Use*

In 1789 the Revolution began, and in 1792 after declaring war on the “league of kings” and their “foreign hordes,” Revolutionary France gave the *ordre profond* its chance.<sup>126</sup> Most aspects of the French military – including the artillery corps, cavalry, and weaponry – remained unchanged by the Revolution.<sup>127</sup> Because of this consistency, many military professionals still favoured line tactics, but there was strong political support behind the *ordre profond*.<sup>128</sup> This was largely superficial; the *ordre profond* lent Revolutionary soldiers an image of independence, self-motivation, and free spirit. Indeed, the image of *arme blanche* won such favour that the construction of several thousand pikes was ordered to replace soldiers’ muskets.<sup>129</sup> Yet while Government officials depicted the *ordre profond* as a successful reincarnation of the armies of ancient Greece and Rome, battlefield realities were much less inspiring. Despite its long development, testing, and political support, the *ordre profond* turned out to be utterly unsuitable for Revolutionary armies. What resulted instead was disastrous, and the image of Dumouriez’s

<sup>126</sup> “Decree of ‘La Patrie en danger’, 11 July 1792,” in *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook*, ed. Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee (London: Routledge, 2002), 64.

<sup>127</sup> As Alder eloquently posits, “Revolutionaries were obliged to make their new world out of the pieces of the old, charting a future that differed surprisingly little from the past.” Alder, 16.

<sup>128</sup> Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 10, 14; Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 189.

<sup>129</sup> Admittedly this idea was later reconsidered, but the support for the pike continued, with the French Minister of War deeming it the “weapon of the free people.” Servan, quoted in Alder, 119.

columns disintegrating on the fields of Jemappes typifies far too many battlefields from the Revolutionary era.

### *The Troops of the Ordre*

The foremost problem the *ordre profond* faced on the battlefield was in deployment. In Mesnil-Durand's tests and Folard's proofs, the column could theoretically deploy quickly into and out of line formation. General opinion thus held that troops should proceed across the battlefield in column; if the enemy did not immediately show signs of weakness, troops should deploy into line in order to maximize firepower.<sup>130</sup> However, commanders soon found that this procedure was not as simple under fire as it had been during drills. By holding deployment until they were certain enemy lines would not break, French commanders regularly marched their columns within range of the enemy. Even the fastest deployment required enough time spent under fire to cause heavy casualties and panic within the column.<sup>131</sup> Enemy commanders, quickly aware of this weakness, often deliberately positioned their own lines to take advantage of terrain and thereby force the French column to wait until it was much too late to deploy.<sup>132</sup> The hope that the *ordre profond* would save time by allowing troops to proceed onto the battlefield straight from the march also proved more difficult than originally imagined. Column depth and positioning was dependent on enemy formations, which could not be determined until the battlefield was approached, meaning that reorganization into suitable formations could still take

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<sup>130</sup> Lacroix, 254-258; Muir, 72.

<sup>131</sup> MacDonald, 163.

<sup>132</sup> Problems caused by battlefield terrain will be specifically discussed below.

Even before war began, that enemy commanders adapted to the French column should not be surprising. As Dumouriez noted in his memoirs, "all of Europe knew beforehand the intention of the French was to obtain the advantage . . . by changing from defensive to offensive," specifically through the use of the column. As has already been mentioned, the texts regarding the *ordre profond* – especially those of Folard and Saxe, were in no way limited to France. Charles François Du Périer Dumouriez, *Memoirs of General Dumourier, Written by Himself*, vol. II, trans. John Fenwick (London: C&G Kearsley, 1794), 17.

hours.<sup>133</sup> Thus, instead of simplifying the battlefield, deploying the *ordre profond* in fact caused a great deal of confusion, especially among newly recruited Revolutionary soldiers.

Troops within the columns were as much to blame for problems in execution as the *ordre* itself. Despite claims that the column was an ideal formation for troops with limited training, the reality was far different. In order to effectively maneuver and deploy the column, soldiers needed to be disciplined, cooperative, and efficient – three things which Revolutionary soldiers could rarely claim to be.<sup>134</sup> Military professionals quickly recognized this and attempted to provide the drilling necessary to make the *ordre profond* feasible.<sup>135</sup> However, discipline turned out to be greatly resisted by Revolutionary soldiers. Fully aware of the propaganda which celebrated the French “soldiers of liberty” as fundamentally different than the Prussian slaves who were “subject to rigorous discipline,” Revolutionary troops often revolted against drills, on one occasion hanging their commander in protest.<sup>136</sup> Consequently, in the early years of the Revolutionary Wars, the *ordre profond* could not maneuver or deploy with any precision or speed. This resulted in what Griffith vividly describes as “blobs of infantry and unorganized skirmish lines” which were incapable of providing decisive results.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>133</sup> “Of Marching,” in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. “The Military Mentor,” (London: Richard Philips, 1809), 216; According to the memoirs of Barrès, this problem in the *ordre profond* was not fixed even under Napoleon: “The head of General d’Harville’s column had appeared at last, but that he would require some hours and a little rest before he could execute the movement required of him.” Barrès, 16-17.

<sup>134</sup> Notably, *ancien régime* tacticians like Saxe had never recommended the *ordre profond* be exempt from discipline. Indeed, Saxe in particular stressed its importance, noting that “The Roman discipline [is] the cause of their greatness. Victory in war does not depend entirely on numbers or mere courage, only skill and discipline will ensure it,” and further that “Les principaux succès que les Romains ont toujours eus avec petites armées contre des multitudes de Barbares, ne doivent s’attribuer à autre chose qu’à l’excellente composition de leurs troupes.” Saxe, “My Reveries, 30; Saxe, *Memoires sur L’Art de la Guerre*, 7.

<sup>135</sup> Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 189.

<sup>136</sup> Bonaparte, “Proclamation to the Army of Italy, 26 April 1796,” in *The French Revolution and Napoleon: A Sourcebook*, ed. Philip G. Dwyer and Peter McPhee (London: Routledge, 2002), 128-129; “Decree of ‘La Patrie en danger’, 11 July 1792,” 64; Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Art of Warfare in the Age of Napoleon* (London: Indiana University Press, 1978), 99.

<sup>137</sup> Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics* 17.

Getting a column to the enemy line was difficult enough. Yet even if the *ordre profond* deployed, charged, and routed the enemy line with success, this was often not the end of a commander's worries. Though it provided a brief rush of good morale, piercing the enemy line rarely produced sufficient results, forcing the enemy into only a temporary panic or withdrawal. But, a successful charge was often a victory enough for the unpaid and underfed French troops. Having gained momentum in their charge, columns of Revolutionary soldiers often seized their opportunity to break away from their officers and continued their run towards the closest town, village, house, or group of bodies in order to loot and pillage.<sup>138</sup> Though the starving troops can hardly be blamed, the break-up of the column became a notorious feature of Revolutionary battles. Even Carnot admitted that after a successful column charge, the soldiers "disband everywhere, and if the enemy returns, he has only to attack resolutely to butcher our men."<sup>139</sup> Not only was this lack of discipline disastrous for the result of the battle, it was not especially popular with the local population either, who were not safe from looting no matter which side of the border they lived on.<sup>140</sup> Of course, such looting was due to larger problems in the Revolutionary armies than can be blamed on the *ordre profond*. Yet, by providing the momentum and temporary distance from their officers, the *ordre profond* allowed troops to scatter much more easily than the *ordre mince*, often with battle-deciding consequences. For the Revolutionary Army, then, the *ordre profond* ironically allowed too much freedom to be feasible.

<sup>138</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 111.

<sup>139</sup> Carnot, quoted in Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 114; John Lynn indicates that columns broke up to pillage at St. Amand, Furnes, Le Blaton, Linselles, Menin, and Pont-a-Chin, demonstrating the repetition of this failure, while Griffith suggests that at Valmy, "there is plenty of reason to believe that the French infantry would have run away again if only the enemy would have persisted." Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 114; Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 183.

<sup>140</sup> According to dragoon Francois Marquant, "many peasants tell me, with tears of despair in their eyes, that they preferred the ancient regime a thousand times more than our Constitution, since at least then no one carried off their property." Quoted in Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 113.

Pillaging was only one of the reasons why the *ordre profond* could fail. Equally, if not more likely to cause a column break-up was low morale. The *ordre*'s creators had expected depth alone to yield high troop morale, but were wrong for a number of reasons. Foremost was the soldiers' inability to return fire against the enemy. Troops in column were expected to hold their fire far longer than when in line, if they were allowed to fire at all. In many cases, commanders specifically instructed soldiers not to load their guns so as not be distracted by the temptation to fire while charging.<sup>141</sup> This inability to return fire caused considerable mental strain.<sup>142</sup> Much worse a strain, however, was artillery fire. Troop accounts suggest there was little worse than artillery fire directed at their column, which caused extremely heavy casualties, generally hitting more than one soldier at a time.<sup>143</sup> Even when artillery fire was not on target, troops knew they were exactly what the fire was meant to hit.<sup>144</sup> Such mental stresses often caused troops to break from column and retreat or panic before they were even in range of the enemy.<sup>145</sup> The assumption that the *ordre profond* could rely on its back troops to press forward and maintain the column's momentum also proved wrong. Forced to step over the mutilated bodies of their colleagues, the troops in back were in fact *most* likely to panic.<sup>146</sup> Consequently, though panic was difficult to control in the *ordre mince*, it rarely caused widespread collapses

<sup>141</sup> Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France* 215.

<sup>142</sup> Muir, 31.

<sup>143</sup> Ensign Leeke, a British soldier, sums up this mental strain: "The standing to be cannonaded, and having nothing else to do, is about the most unpleasant thing that can happen to soldiers in an engagement." Leeke, quoted in Muir, 47; Likewise, Jomini concurs, "The moral effect of a reverse fire upon a body of troops is inconceivable, and the best troops are generally put to flight by it . . . A few pieces of light artillery, thrown at all hazards upon the enemy's flank, may produce most important results" Jomini, quoted in Muir, 47.

<sup>144</sup> Muir, 47.

<sup>145</sup> Indeed, Dumouriez criticized the Revolutionary armies for their lack of spirit and courage, stating specifically of the volunteers that they "might be wolves, but still ran like sheep." Dumouriez, quoted in Rothenberg, 111; The Volunteer battalion at the Battle of Nerwinde provides a good example of how this break-up could reverse the results of a battle. After a successful charge by the sixth and seventh columns, "when they were already masters of Orsmael, a panic seized upon the battalions of Volunteers, and they fled, leaving the troops of the line exposed. The Imperialists, seeing the disorder, charged the two columns with their horse, which put it entirely to rout. Guiscard, Major-General of the artillery was killed, as well as great numbers of the Aids-de-camp and the officers of the staff; and General Ruault and General Ihler were wounded." Dumouriez, 119-120.

<sup>146</sup> Ardant du Picq, quoted in Muir, 72.

like in the *ordre profond*. Devastating the troops' morale before they ever reached the enemy line, the *ordre profond* was not the container of enthusiasm which its originators had hoped or which politicians broadcast.

The *ordre profond* could also not effectively counter landscape difficulties on the battlefield. Almost every advantage the *ordre profond* had on the linear battlefield was lost when the terrain was obstructed or rough. Admittedly, the *ordre mince* often did little better on rough ground. Yet because the *ordre profond* was designed specifically to solve this predicament, that it could not cope in rough terrain was a considerable problem.<sup>147</sup> The physical terrain was difficult enough. Navigating woods, marshes, mud, or other such obstacles at the very least slowed a column down, leaving it vulnerable to enemy fire.<sup>148</sup> Accordingly, commanders often distributed their troops in alternate formations.<sup>149</sup> To make matters worse, enemy commanders quickly understood this weakness, and planned their battlefield to specifically exploit it.<sup>150</sup> Just as confusing were the civilian obstacles on the battlefield, such as towns or houses. Unable to effectively pass through or charge an occupied town or building, the column regularly broke up amidst the confusion.<sup>151</sup> Dumouriez provides an example of such confusion during the Battle of Nerwinde. Having "crowded in too great a number into the village of Oberwinde" the columns

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<sup>147</sup> This is exactly what Wimpfen, observer of the 1778 tests by Mesnil-Durand and Broglie, had worried about. Noting the difficulties which the columns had in dealing with rough terrain while in drill, Wimpfen was right in suggesting that under fire, such hiccups could turn into disasters. Wimpfen, quoted in Quimby, 236-237; "Instructions Previously to going into Action; by M. Puysegur," in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. "The Military Mentor," (London: Richard Philips, 1809), 157.

<sup>148</sup> "The Military Institutes of Onesander, relative to the Duties and Qualifications of a General; translated from the Greek," in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. "The Military Mentor," (London: Richard Philips, 1809), 7.

<sup>149</sup> Arnold, 539.

<sup>150</sup> Arnold, 548.

<sup>151</sup> Muir, 17; Baron Lejeune notes that these experiences introduced the troops to an entirely different style of warfare: "The experience gained day by day in this extraordinary kind of warfare served to teach us much in every way, and our prudence and method alike grew greater and greater. Directly a house was taken, it was converted into a fortress." Lejeune, 150.



“fell into confusion, and were in such complete disorder, that on the appearance of a second attack from the enemy they abandoned the place.”<sup>152</sup>

Such low morale ensured that the *ordre profond* by itself was unable to effectively combat desertion. In the field, Dumouriez complained consistently that desertion racked his troops “in the most frightening manner,” reducing his once 500-600 man battalions to 200 men within a month.<sup>153</sup> The *ordre profond* was in part to blame for this. Following a break up of a column, either in panic or to pillage, troops were little inclined to return to camp after having disobeyed their officers.<sup>154</sup> Additionally, the assumption that close-quarter infantry formations would promote a sense of camaraderie and brotherly love as they had in antiquity fell flat. Richard Cobb has suggested that the Revolution actually provoked hostilities between towns, provinces, and cities of France, making it unlikely that soldiers would be prepared to die for the man beside them.<sup>155</sup> The *ordre profond* was not enough to undo generations of separation and hostility between regions of France, and forcing soldiers together did little to inspire a spirit of brotherhood. Of course, the *ordre profond* is in no way to blame for the vast numbers of deserters during the Revolutionary Wars, and, given the high numbers of new recruits, untrained volunteers, and unwilling draftees, the desertion levels are not surprising. However, because the *ordre* was specifically designed to combat desertion, that it failed to reduce the number of absconders in any substantial way meant that it failed in one of its most crucial objectives.

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<sup>152</sup> Dumouriez, 117-118.

<sup>153</sup> Doumouriez, quoted in Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 110.

<sup>154</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 113; Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 178.

<sup>155</sup> Richard Cobb, *Paris and its Provinces, 1792-1802* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), 121-123; Though, Revolutionary propagandists tried hard to instil at least some notion “sweet brotherhood,” evoking the “duties of citizen soldiers” and the “spirit of patriotism” and calling for soldiers to “renounce your hatreds . . . forget your political differences . . . [and] rally to the common cause.” “Decree of ‘La Patrie en danger’, 11 July 1792,” 64.

## *The Ordre and the Enemy*

Though considerable time and effort had been spent on developing the *ordre profond* throughout the eighteenth century, other aspects of warfare had developed correspondingly. As a result, by the time it was put to use the *ordre profond* did not accurately reflect many of the realities of warfare. Instead of being a revolutionary new tactic, it was not revolutionary enough, not having been altered enough to face new elements of battle. One such element was enemy cavalry. The Revolutionary Army was unable to field a large number of cavalry units due to the cost and training required, while other powers relied heavily on cavalry units.<sup>156</sup> French tactics should have adapted accordingly, yet did not. Due to its lack of firepower, the column was extremely vulnerable to cavalry.<sup>157</sup> Commanders were understandably hesitant to put columns into the field without first assuring they could be defended against cavalry, hence Dumouriez's insistence on cannonading the Austrians at Jemappes before crossing the plain.<sup>158</sup> Even with artillery support, commanders often favoured either depleting the numbers in the column to form protective lines, or deploying numerous smaller columns in order to make square formation – the most effective defence against cavalry – readily accessible.<sup>159</sup> However, by reducing the power, momentum, and numbers of columns, this cautious approach virtually erased any advantage which a column might have had on the battlefield.

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<sup>156</sup> Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 225, 228.

<sup>157</sup> MacDonald, 103.

<sup>158</sup> "Battle of Jemappes," 78.

<sup>159</sup> "Of the Various Attacks of Cavalry," in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. "The Military Mentor," (London: Richard Philips, 1809), 356. Marshal MacDonald describes the scramble to avoid his columns being caught by cavalry: "my two divisions formed themselves into attacking columns. The enemy, who were still advancing, halted, redoubling their fire, causing us terrible loss. However, in proportion as my ranks became thinned, I drew them up closer and made them dress up as at drill. ; While I was doing this, I saw the enemy's cavalry preparing to charge, and had barely time to close my second line on the first one; they were flanked by the two divisions still in column, and the square was thus completed." MacDonald, 163.

Similarly, the *ordre profond* found itself flanked and out-manoeuvred on a number of occasions by light infantry and skirmisher units.<sup>160</sup> The increasing focus on artillery had occasioned interest in skirmisher units as far back as the Seven Years War, and particularly after the American Revolution.<sup>161</sup> Skirmishers were an ideal solution to avoid giving the enemy artillery an easy target. Therefore, when the French column charged to break the enemy line, it often did not face a simple line of soldiers, complicating the entire purpose of breaking the line. The *ordre profond* had of course been designed under the assumption that the battlefield would remain geometric, yet the opposite was true. Fire from widely dispersed enemy skirmishers disrupted and intimidated columns, yet pursuing the skirmishers while in column was ineffective, forcing commanders without a strong cavalry to break battalions into line and skirmisher units of their own.<sup>162</sup> Later, new rifles like the British Baker rifle, which went into service in 1801, gave skirmisher and rifleman units like the British 95<sup>th</sup> regiment greater accuracy and range.<sup>163</sup> British sharpshooters could specifically target French officers from long range, sending columns into disarray with only a handful of shots. The *ordre profond* was not *revolutionary*; in fact, it was not revolutionary *enough*.

Just as detrimental to the *ordre profond* were battlefield defences. Defences such as trenches, redoubts, walls, and artillery bastions made manoeuvring and attack extremely difficult for troops in column. As mentioned above, tacticians like Folard and Mesnil-Durand had expected battle to be a clash of geometric infantry on a linear battlefield, just as it had been for the Greek *phalanxes*. However, this view seriously underestimated the growing importance of

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<sup>160</sup> Though skirmishers have often been claimed as invention of the liberal-minded Revolutionary armies, Muir makes it clear that the British and Prussians already had well-established skirmisher units throughout Seven Years' War, and that their success had prompted a further investment. Muir, 49, 51, 53.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>162</sup> Barrès, 180.

<sup>163</sup> Muir, 53.

battlefield defences.<sup>164</sup> On the Revolutionary battlefields, defences and obstacles became the centre of virtually every clash.<sup>165</sup> Generals' attention became focused on the taking of trenches, houses, walls, and other such obstacles. Columns could not be deployed effectively until the risk which enemy defences posed was diminished.<sup>166</sup> Such defences removed the *ordre profond*'s advantage of speed and depth. Instead, fights over single parts of the battlefield could take hours or days, forcing stagnation and indecision, the very things the column was designed to solve.<sup>167</sup> As a result, commanders deployed large numbers of troops in formations other than in column, including the *ordre mince* or skirmishers, and focused on creating defences of their own.<sup>168</sup> The *ordre profond* could play little role amid this stagnation.

Artillery was the last of the column's major concerns. On one hand, it was acknowledged that the *ordre profond* could not operate without artillery. Indeed, Griffith has suggested that whenever the *ordre profond* was successful, it had artillery to thank.<sup>169</sup> Though canon barrages could go on for hours, they were vital to weaken the enemy at critical points and thereby make a column charge feasible.<sup>170</sup> Additionally, artillery was essential to prevent enemy canon and cavalry from targeting the column as it advanced, as Dumouriez's example at Jemappes

<sup>164</sup> In fact, even the suggestion that the Greeks did not encounter battlefield defences was a romanticised view. Herodotus indicates that at the Battle of Plataea, for example, Greeks were called upon to deal with battlefield defense systems from the Persians, causing a great deal of indecision. Herodotus, *The Histories*, ed. Robert B. Strassler, trans. Andrea L. Purvis (Toronto: Random House, 2007), 694, 699.

<sup>165</sup> This conclusion is based on the prevalence of battlefield defences and the central attention placed on them in the diaries of Barrès, MacDonald, Lejeune, Jomini, and Dumouriez.

<sup>166</sup> Muir, 20; French instructions on the building of redoubts noted that even against an extremely strong army, redoubts could be held indefinitely by 200-300 of "the most undisciplined troops," demonstrating their strength. "The Circular Redoubt," in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. "The Military Mentor," (London: Richard Phillips, 1809), 437.

<sup>167</sup> In one case, Barrès notes, enemy trenches stalled the French from attacking the enemy for days on end: "Too weak to hold the open country, the enemy sought to draw us towards his entrenchments, to overwhelm us with his heavy artillery, but we, in turn, were not strong enough to attempt to attack these numerous positions, which were also well armed; so that days passed in demonstrations on one side or the other, without any very sharp engagement. All arms – infantry, cavalry, artillery – were in action, without suffering much loss." Barrès, 178-179.

<sup>168</sup> MacDonald, 163. Barrès, 179.

<sup>169</sup> Griffith, *French Napoleonic Infantry Tactics*, 16.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibidem*.

demonstrates.<sup>171</sup> In this light, arguments that Napoleon's success relied largely on his extensive use of artillery do not seem far-fetched.<sup>172</sup> At the very least, the French artillery was an essential part of any decisive victory which the *ordre profond* might claim. On a psychological level, successful artillery kept the French troops relatively confident and stable.<sup>173</sup> As badly as the troops felt when the artillery bombarded them, they felt equally encouraged when their artillery bombarded somebody else. Thus, whenever the French artillery was strong, the *ordre profond* might operate with success.

On the other hand, strong enemy artillery often made the *ordre profond* the worst choice a commander could make. The psychological effect of enemy artillery has already been discussed, and such fear was not unwarranted. The consequences of faster, lighter, and more manoeuvrable artillery which had developed during the later eighteenth century were devastating, proving du Coudray correct.<sup>174</sup> Accurate ball-shots could pierce the column and take thirty or so soldiers down with them, while canister-shots sprayed hundreds of musket balls and shrapnel at columns with devastating efficiency.<sup>175</sup> Light artillery allowed enemy commanders to reposition their cannons and target columns whenever necessary, making no charge safe from artillery fire.<sup>176</sup> As

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<sup>171</sup> "Battle of Jemappes," 78.

<sup>172</sup> Bruce McConachy, "The Roots of Artillery Doctrine: Napoleonic Artillery Tactics Reconsidered," *The Journal of Military History* 65, no 3 (June 2001): 617; Alder, 123.

<sup>173</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel Dickson describes the positive mental effect which friendly canons had on troops: "They are more useful from the confidence they give men, than from their own effect . . . soldiers like the noise of Artillery; it gives them confidence when employed in their support, with however little effect" Dickson, quoted in Muir, 34.

<sup>174</sup> McConachy, 623; The reader will recall that DuCoudray insisted that artillery would devastate the *ordre profond* to a greater degree than it would the *ordre mince*; In agreement with Du Coudray, Wimpfen stated after observing the 1778 tests that "the time that would have been necessary for these columns, marching at the most rapid manoeuvre pace, to arrive at the range of charging with the bayonet, and calculating the ground that they had to cover only from the point where artillery could do execution, each [enemy] gun would easily have been able to fire 50 shots, and there would have followed likewise a total destruction of these formidable columns, which probably would have sought their safety in flight." Wimpfen, quoted in Quimby, 240.

<sup>175</sup> Barrès, 184; Muir, 31. Even in Italy Napoleon was not free from the plague of artillery. At Lodi in 1796, for example, he notes "We easily routed a battalion and some squadrons of the enemy from Lodi, and pursued them so closely as to prevent their destroying the bridge. I immediately formed my grenadiers in close column and threw them upon the bridge. But assailed by a murderous storm of grape they were staggered." Anthony Henry Jomini, *Life of Napoleon*, vol. 1, trans. by H. W. Halleck (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1864), 99.

<sup>176</sup> McConachy, 618; Muir, 33.

the power of artillery grew, the *ordre profond* could not go into battle without it. At the same time, in the presence of enemy artillery, the *ordre profond* could hardly go into battle at all.<sup>177</sup> Thus, despite the claims that the *ordre profond* initiated the renewal of deep-order infantry tactics, the growing presence of artillery on the battlefield, combined with other deficiencies, suggest that the *ordre profond* signalled the end of deep-order tactics, not their rebirth.<sup>178</sup> Even the most resolute of soldiers were unable to maintain the *ordre profond* in the face of such opposition, making it clear why, though he modelled his Valmy campaign after the Battle of Thermopylae, Dumouriez's "'300 Spartans' unfortunately ran away."<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> In an essay published in 1806, the view that columns were essentially not viable in the face of enemy artillery is plainly stated: "'The artillery of the present day is very much multiplied in our armies . . . the artillery has brought along with it the present tactics of our troops . . . Canon compels us to advance only in line"' "Of Artillery and Fire-Arms in general," in *Essays on the Theory and Practice of the Art of War: Including the Duties of Officers on Actual Service, and the Principles of Modern Tactics, Chiefly Translated from the best French and German Writers*, vol. 2, ed. "The Military Mentor," (London: Richard Philips, 1809), 365.

<sup>178</sup> Consequently, Alder asserts, "the 'humming . . . , gurgling . . . , whistling' sound, which Goethe later told the Prussian troops signalled 'the beginning of a new epoch,' was the sounds of Gribeauval's artillery flying overhead." Alder, 124.

<sup>179</sup> Griffith, *The Art of War of Revolutionary France*, 203.

## *VI. A Tactical Revolution?*

Despite these clear problems on the battlefield, the Revolutionary *ordre profond* did not end when Napoleon seized power. Instead, for two key reasons, the *ordre profond* was not abandoned. First is the strong political support given to it throughout the Revolutionary period. Not only were officers used to employing columns, in many cases they had no choice *but* to employ them. Orders to use the *ordre profond* whenever possible came directly from Paris. Inspired by the Roman Legions, Saint-Just – a National Convention deputy and confidant of Robespierre – declared that “the French armies must stress shock tactics,” and campaigned for their continued use in the Revolutionary Wars.<sup>180</sup> Lazare Carnot, the titled “Organizer of Victory,” ordered the use of the *ordre profond* officially in 1794: “The general instructions are always to manoeuvre in mass and offensively and to use the bayonet on every occasion.”<sup>181</sup> The implementation of these orders, however, came not from commanders or officers, but from the civilian deputies who were given absolute authority within the army. Gunther Rothenberg suggests that against the wishes and better judgment of military officers, who denounced the

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<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

<sup>181</sup> Lynn, *Bayonets of the Republic*, 256; Rothenberg suggests that this conviction for the *ordre profond* came from Carnot’s own use of the formation at Wattignies in 1793. During the Battle of Wattignies, Carnot’s column was successful only after two unsuccessful charges, resulting in an extremely costly victory. Rothenberg, 115.

deputies as “bloodthirsty doctrinaires,” these civilians could enforce any tactical or strategic decisions which they saw fit, and answered only to the government in Paris.<sup>182</sup> Deputies made and justified decisions based only on their Revolutionary zeal, regularly causing them to choose the options which seemed ideologically, rather than tactically, sound. Rothenberg notes that “there is no doubt about their ruthlessness, or for that matter the atrocities and injustices they committed.”<sup>183</sup> Yet, deputies were promoted over less zealous officers, and by the end of the Revolutionary Wars, many competent officers had been replaced by these civilian deputies.<sup>184</sup> As a result, Napoleon inherited a group of officers who were not educated military professionals, but ardent Revolutionaries who, by and large, agreed with the ideological soundness of the *ordre profond* and ignored its costs and flaws.

The second reason for the perseverance of the *ordre profond* is that Napoleon did not spend time or effort on battle tactics. Devoting little time or interest into ground-level tactics, Napoleon was content to leave battle operations in the hand of subordinate officers and lower ranking commanders.<sup>185</sup> Though typically accredited as preferring a style of *ordre mixte*, Napoleon generally focussed on manoeuvring and grand strategy.<sup>186</sup> Inheriting a group of commanders already familiar with the *ordre profond* from their Revolutionary experiences, Napoleon thus inherited the column as well. As the Napoleonic Wars continued, education systems for officers were significantly reduced. Though supposed to complete a two-year course at the *École Spéciale Militaire*, during the Napoleonic Wars officers often spent only a few weeks in

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<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 111-112.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibidem*; Rothenberg notes the account of Lavasseur, a Deputy in the French Revolutionary Army, whose lack of previous military experience was brushed aside. Carnot even stated to Lavasseur that “Your strength of character and devotion to the Republic are our guarantee,” and told him that his orders were in his own “heart and head; they will come out when needed.” *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>185</sup> Liddell Hart, *The Ghost of Napoleon* (London: Faber & Faber, 1933), 36.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibidem*.



schooling before they were posted, leaving little time for any analysis of the *ordre profond*.<sup>187</sup>

Experienced officers from the Revolutionary Wars were either influenced by the wills of the deputies, or were deputies themselves, and therefore carried the *ordre profond* into the Napoleonic Wars. New officers had only the veterans to instruct them, and presumably copied the *ordre*. Napoleon did not interfere in this pattern. However, as will be discussed, simply because the *ordre* existed did not mean it was widely used or widely successful.

The use of the *ordre profond* on the Napoleonic battlefield has been recently studied by historian James Arnold.<sup>188</sup> Consequently, this study will only briefly analyze the column's use by Napoleon and his officers, and will refer to Arnold's findings when possible. In general, Arnold suggests that the *ordre profond* was limited in use. After initial attempts to attack in column, Arnold posits, commanders typically abandoned the formation, and used the *ordre profond* as an attacking formation only by mistake or miscalculation. Analyzing the Peninsular Campaign in particular, Arnold finds that column formations were typically intended for deployment, and that French columns would deploy into line in order to face the enemy whenever possible.<sup>189</sup> Noting that bayonet charges were extremely rare, Arnold concludes that even when the column was used during the Peninsular Campaign, it was not a decisive factor in battles.<sup>190</sup> Accounts like the following description of a column approach from Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, a French captain under Suchet in the Peninsular campaign, support Arnold's conclusions:

About a thousand yards from the English line our men became excited, they started talking and quickened the pace; our column becomes somewhat disordered. The English, firm as a long red wall, are motionless with their arms at the port. Inevitably their steadiness has an effect on our young soldiers. As we got nearer there are shouts of *Vive l'Empereur! En*

<sup>187</sup> Rothenberg, 132.

<sup>188</sup> Specifically James Arnold's afore-cited "A Reappraisal of the Column Versus the Line in the Peninsular War," *The Journal of Military History* 68, no. 2 (April 2004): 535-552.

<sup>189</sup> Arnold, 538-41.

<sup>190</sup> Arnold, 548; Rothenberg, 156.

*avant avec la Bayonette!*, shakos<sup>191</sup> are hoisted on the muzzles of muskets, we break into a double, the ranks become ragged, there is a tumult of shouting, scattered shots are fired. The English line is still silent and immovable. They appear to ignore the storm about to break over them although we are now less than three hundred paces from them. This is unnerving. Each of us begins to feel that it will not be pleasant when the enemy, having waited so long, decides to fire. Our ardour begins to cool. We keep up our spirits by shouting all the louder. At last the English volley, precise, deadly thunderous. Decimated, our column staggers, checks, tries to recover itself. The enemy breaks their long silence with a cheer. Then a second volley, perhaps a third. Then they are upon us, chasing us into a disorderly retreat.<sup>192</sup>

Additionally, Rothenberg suggests that by the Napoleonic Wars the column had changed substantially from its original *phalanx* design. Instead, he asserts, the column had become much less deep, resulting in a rectangle whose front was far larger than its depth. This new Napoleonic column was 40 men wide and only 12 deep. This alteration increased the firepower of the column while reducing its capacity for shock and piercing movements.<sup>193</sup> Based on the conclusions of Arnold and Rothenberg, then, the *ordre profond* was rarely used for its original purpose, it was largely unsuccessful when it was used to break an enemy line, and it was altered considerably from the Revolutionary *phalanx*-style column in order to maximize its firepower, reducing its capacity for shock action as a result.

Specific examples of the column on the Napoleonic battlefields serve to support the conclusions listed above. One of the most famous uses of a column, the Battle of Wagram (1809), provides a good case in point for several reasons. Foremost, the column at Wagram – commanded by Macdonald – was not traditional column. Instead, it was formed of eight battalions in line, with battalions on either side in column formations, resulting in a large, hollow

<sup>191</sup> A tall, cylindrical military hat with a short visor and plume

<sup>192</sup> Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, quoted in Michael Glover, *Warfare from Waterloo to Mons* (London: Cassell, 1980), 24; The memoirs of Barrès also support Arnold's findings: cited above, see pages 38, 43.

<sup>193</sup> Rothenberg, 154.

square rather than a *phalanx*.<sup>194</sup> This variation provided considerably more firepower, but moved much slower than the traditional *ordre profond*. Despite Macdonald's ultimate success, it is notable that of the 13,000 soldiers making up the column, approximately 10,000 were killed or wounded in the advance.<sup>195</sup> Even the most successful column movements, then, were not without enormous casualties. Similarly, at Waterloo the French columns were altered to be roughly 200 yards long and only 25 yards deep.<sup>196</sup> The advantage of these altered columns is that they could easily change into lines. At Waterloo, Arnold suggests, British fire prevented the French columns from effectively deploying into line, causing the infamous failed French assault.<sup>197</sup> The Battle of Maida (1806) also demonstrates an instance in which the French intended to deploy their assault columns into line, but were held from doing so by British fire.<sup>198</sup> In these examples, the *ordre profond* is evidently secondary to line formation, and was only maintained by mistake.

Moreover, the *ordre* does not appear to be a key part of Napoleon's success, for it was only by suffering enormous casualties that the column could be successful, as at Wagram. This casualty rate is described by Barrès, demonstrating the chilling consequences of using the *ordre profond* on the Napoleonic battlefield:

As soon as we arrived our thin column was ploughed by enemy balls. Officers and soldiers fall like ears of corn before the reaper's sickle. The cannonballs ploughed through our ranks from the first to the last, each time sweeping away at least thirty men when they took the column full on. The officers who remained were doing nothing but go from the right to the left of their squadrons to make them close ranks toward the right . . . and prevent the men from massing together or wheeling around on themselves. We lost, in this disastrous day, the bloodiest that had been hitherto, the majority of officers and more than half of our men. I had not twenty men left of the two hundred and more who had answered the roll since the beginning of this disastrous campaign. The army corps no longer existed save in name.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Glover, 23; Rothenberg, 154.

<sup>195</sup> Glover, 23; Hart, 18.

<sup>196</sup> Rothenberg, 154; Arnold, 548.

<sup>197</sup> Arnold, 545-6.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 543.

<sup>199</sup> Barrès, 184-185.

By re-evaluating how the column was actually used on the Napoleonic battlefields, and by determining its approximate rate of success, a new version of military history may be formed. Many military historians consider the tactical developments which culminated in the First World War to have begun in the Revolutionary and Napoleonic era. As a result, Ute Planert suggests, the Napoleonic Wars are regarded as a “caesura in world history,” and “most historians agree that the path toward total warfare began at the end of the eighteenth century.”<sup>200</sup> This consensus has been deemed the “master narrative” of military history by scholar Roger Chickering.<sup>201</sup> For the parameters of this study, it is most important to note that according to this “master narrative,” the Revolutionary Wars mark a period of tactical revolution from which Napoleon inherited his success. Given that Napoleon’s success was not based on technological superiority, the new tactics of the Revolutionary Army, many conclude, were the root of the Emperor’s success.<sup>202</sup> Rothenberg, for example, suggests that the “armies of the French Revolution represented a new departure in military organization and the art of war” which ultimately became the Napoleonic standard.<sup>203</sup> However, as the above demonstrates, it may be concluded that the *ordre profond*, though carried into the Napoleonic period largely for political reasons, was clearly not a key factor contributing to Napoleon’s success.

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<sup>200</sup> Ute Planert, “Old or New? The French Wars: Toward a Concept of Evolutionary Change,” in *War in an Age of Revolution, 1775-1815*, eds. Roger Chickering and Stig Forster (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 69; Jeremy Black criticizes David Bell’s *First Total War* for taking this approach, suggesting that Bell creates “a linear, progressive and teleological account both of warfare and of the relationship between war and society” which is “seriously flawed.” Jeremy Black, *War in the Nineteenth Century, 1800-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2009), 7-8.

<sup>201</sup> Planert, 69-70.

<sup>202</sup> Indeed, over the eighteenth century very few significant changes in military technology were made. A French soldier at Waterloo, for example, might well be carrying a 1772 pattern musket, as it had virtually no difference in range or speed than the 1794 or 1802 pattern muskets. Rothenberg, 140.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 95. Notably, Rothenberg suggests that “the new branch made its debut at Jemappes and performed very well,” a contradiction to the account of Jemappes which this study opened with. *Ibid.*, 107.

Despite the shortcomings of the *ordre profond*, the notion of a tactical transformation may not be without merit. Indeed, a number of tactical changes appear to have contributed to the overwhelming success of the French army. Military historian Liddel Hart suggests that instead of inheriting a tactical system based around the *ordre profond*, Napoleon inherited a “three-prong trident.”<sup>204</sup> The first of these prongs was an expanded use of skirmishers and light infantry. As discussed previously, the use of skirmishers proved advantageous against new artillery and mass formations, as was greatly expanded during the Revolutionary Wars. Hart suggests that the soldiers of the Revolutionary Armies avoided ranged battles, fighting instead in a “semi-guerrilla fashion” based on small combat units using fire and movement tactics.<sup>205</sup> This flexibility proved to be a key feature in Napoleonic battles. The second prong was mobile field artillery. Introduced by Gribeauval during the mid-eighteenth century as discussed above, the new artillery was lighter and faster, and by the Revolutionary period had become standardized. Tactically, this innovation allowed for concentrations of artillery in battle which could be quickly directed against the enemy’s weak spots.<sup>206</sup> The final prong was manoeuvrability. Able to move quickly and independently, small units based on the divisional and regimental system developed by Saxe and Guibert were put into action by Carnot during the Revolutionary Wars.<sup>207</sup> Combining these three factors, Hart posits, proved the key to Napoleon’s success. As a result, it is perhaps not out of place to consider the Revolutionary Wars a period of tactical transformation, although it

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<sup>204</sup> Hart, 98-99.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, 97; Indeed, some observers felt that fight in open order was the major tactic employed by the French armies. “One can truthfully say that by the end of 1793 the French armies had only light infantry.” General Duhesme, quoted in Rothenberg, 115; Hart argues that “Already, experience had shown that the dangers of dispersion were far less than formerly, owing to the rapid marching and increased resisting power of such divisions, and also because they were such fluid targets. Already, instinct had led the soldiers of the Revolution to fight in semi-guerrilla fashion, and experience of their undisciplined ways had taught their officers the wisdom of avoiding ranged battles, and to guide their instinct so that a quantity of small combats had a collective effect, like a flood crumbling an embankment. These serial actions began to take the place of the old-style one-column battle.” *Ibid.*, 97.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibidem*; Black, 12.

<sup>207</sup> Hart, 97; Black, 11-12.

should be stressed that each of the three prongs was more the result of evolution rather than revolution. Either way, these tactical shifts did not rely on or center on the *ordre profond*.

Accordingly, several military historians have suggested that the tactical systems of Napoleon's army were not as important as they have been made to appear in the "master narrative" of military history. Planert argues that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic wars should be seen "less as a revolutionary caesura than as a stage in an evolutionary process," arguing instead that the only true innovation from the period was a new political legitimization for war.<sup>208</sup> Jeremy Black supports this conclusion by noting that Napoleon's armies had far less success against non-Western powers, pointing to French losses in Haiti as an example.<sup>209</sup> Consequently, Black concludes that the tactical system used by Napoleon was not fundamentally successful, but limited in success to its specific time and place.<sup>210</sup> If the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars can thus be removed from their watershed position within the narrative of military history, it seems evident that the *ordre profond* should be removed from its celebrated position as a key factor in modern warfare.

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<sup>208</sup> Planert, 71, 84.

<sup>209</sup> Black, 11, 15-18, 20-21.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

## VII. Jomini and the Column, 1815- 1869

Given its limited success throughout the Revolutionary and the Napoleonic Wars, when the wars stopped in 1815 the *ordre profond* should theoretically have stopped with them. Yet, the *ordre profond* persisted almost unquestioned for at least a generation after the Napoleonic Wars. As this chapter will argue, it was not because of any success or necessity on the battlefield that the *ordre profond* persisted, but rather because of the unique military culture which developed in France following the Napoleonic Wars. This military culture will be investigated specifically through the leading military thinker in France between 1815 and 1869, Antoine-Henri Jomini (1779-1869). The "founder of modern strategy," Jomini was a Swiss who in 1803, despite his youth, had his first book on military theory subsidized by one of Napoleon's generals.<sup>211</sup> Soon after, Jomini became an aide-de-camp in the French army, serving at Austerlitz before being

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<sup>211</sup> Jomini was subsidized by Marshal Ney; John Shy, "Jomini," in *Makers of Modern Strategy: From Machiavelli to the Nuclear Age*, eds. Peter Paret, Gordon Craig, and Felix Gilbert (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 143-4, 147.

attached to Napoleon's personal staff.<sup>212</sup> Jomini's *Précis de l'Art de la Guerre* became the standard military doctrine for the French military in the nineteenth century, and enjoyed influence throughout Europe. Jomini's key advantage was the ability to claim that his writings were a summary of Napoleon's success, as he had known and studied the Emperor personally.<sup>213</sup> Having witnessed countless battles and campaigns both in French and in Russian service, if anyone should have denounced the column as unsuitable for modern warfare, seemingly that person should have been Jomini. Yet, as will be discussed, Jomini had various reasons to cling to the *ordre*, and as a result the *ordre profond* retained its celebrated place in military history.

Typically, it should be noted, Jomini is acclaimed as a strategist, not as a tactician. Indeed, Jomini stresses throughout his *Précis* that his focus applies only to the realm of strategy, not tactics. Yet, Jomini breaks his own rule, and blurs the line between tactics and strategy frequently. As Shy notes, Jomini's message remains essentially "ambiguous."<sup>214</sup> Though Jomini's intent might initially have been to deal exclusively with grand strategy, instead he ends up in an ambiguous position between strategy and tactics. As a result, on numerous occasions Jomini deals specifically with the *ordre profond*, and his recommendations for it apply specifically to battlefield tactics, though he applies the same logic and method as when dealing when strategy. Despite his strategic outlook, because of his ambiguous message, Jomini's conclusions about warfare were applied to tactics – and to the *ordre profond* – not only by those influenced by him, but by Jomini himself. Therefore, because Jomini held so central a role within French military thought between 1815 and 1869, he seems the best lens through which to approach and better understand French tactical decisions.

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<sup>212</sup> Shy, 144.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid.*, 145; Hart, 104; Black, 28.

<sup>214</sup> Shy, 175.



Based on the conclusions already drawn in this study, Jomini seemingly should have renounced the *ordre profond* as, if not totally unsuccessful, at least outdated. On the one hand, Jomini does recognize that the *ordre profond* had weaknesses. Noting that a deep column “presents too good a mark for artillery,” Jomini holds that attacks in deep masses were “injudicious” and “impracticable,” and could too easily be thrown into confusion.<sup>215</sup> Speaking from experience, Jomini documents that “it very rarely happens that such a collision between opposing troops takes place [and] that mere weight decides the contest.”<sup>216</sup> He notes that French columns did not succeed at Talavera, Busaco, Fuentes-de-Onore, Albuera, or at Waterloo.<sup>217</sup> Jomini also expresses that in the Peninsular theatre of the Napoleonic Wars, Wellington was particularly adept at destroying French columns:

Having learned by experience the effects of the fury and impetuosity of the French columns when led by such men as Massena and Ney, Wellington decided upon wise means of weakening this impetuosity and afterward securing a triumph over it. He chose positions difficult to approach, and covered all their avenues by swarms of Spanish and Portuguese riflemen, who were skilled in taking advantage of the inequalities of the ground; he placed a part of his artillery on the tactical crest of his position, and a part more to the rear, and riddled the advancing columns with a murderous artillery and musketry fire, while his excellent English infantry, sheltered from the fire, were posted a hundred paces in rear of the crest, to await the arrival of these columns; and when the latter appeared on the summit, wearied, out of breath, decimated in numbers, they were received with a general discharge of artillery and musketry and immediately charged by the infantry with the bayonet.<sup>218</sup>

Despite these passing denunciations of the *ordre profond*, however, Jomini holds that the column still ought to have been successful. Therefore he maintains that the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars were not sufficient examples to prove “the superiority of musketry-fire over

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<sup>215</sup> Antoine Henri Jomini, *The Art of War* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1862), Kindle Edition, Loc. 4466-75, 2841-77. The reader should note that Location Numbers will provided in lieu of page numbers for *The Art of War* Kindle Edition. These location numbers are based on 100% screen size.

<sup>216</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 4388-4408.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4498-99.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5352-61.

well-directed attacks in columns.”<sup>219</sup> Despite his hesitations about artillery fire, Jomini still recommends the *ordre profond* as one of only four methods for deploying troops:

These different manners of formation are, therefore, reducible to four: the shallow order, where the line is deployed in three ranks; the half-deep order, formed of a line of battalions in columns doubled on the center or in battalion squares; the mixed order, where regiments are partly in line and partly in column; finally, the deep order, composed of heavy columns of battalions deployed one behind the other.<sup>220</sup>

In order to resolve any hesitations about the *ordre profond*, Jomini recommends not an abandonment of the formation, but a minor alteration to it. Suggesting that the traditional column of attack had too many non-combatants, Jomini’s modified column reduces the number of soldiers within the column from four divisions to three, with the fourth deployed as skirmishers. Reducing the number of men from 800 to 600, Jomini also recommends a widening of the front of the column, maximizing the firepower from approximately 100 to 400 shots per volley.<sup>221</sup> However, Jomini maintains that the column of attack “is not intended to fire” and therefore stresses the mobility of the column above all else. He states again that enemy fire may be problematic for advancing columns, but stresses absolutely that he “cannot imagine a better method of forming infantry for the attack than in columns of battalions.”<sup>222</sup> To counter the firepower disadvantage, then, Jomini recommends that future commanders investigate the possibility of restoring “the helmets and breastplates of the fifteenth century.”<sup>223</sup> Jomini had the opportunity to discuss these plans with Wellington, who was sceptical and dismissive of the deep-order formation.<sup>224</sup> Nevertheless, Jomini stuck to his marginally modified *ordre profond*, stating not only that he felt that columns would be successful under most circumstances, but that

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5378-79.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4415-18.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4424-35.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4514-21.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4514-21. Accordingly, Jomini predicted for the future: “We may then see again the famous men-at-arms all covered with armor, and horses also will require the same protection.” *Ibid.*, Loc. 607-8.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5241-45.

Napoleon always wanted columns to be formed and used in Jomini's prescribed manner anyway.<sup>225</sup> Accordingly, the *ordre profond* was not dismissed as unsuccessful; it was retained, seemingly only in need of minor alterations. In this way, Liddel Hart posits, Jomini missed "the deepest tactical lesson of the Napoleonic wars."<sup>226</sup>

Four key factors contributed to Jomini's retention of the *ordre profond*, and in combination they were strong enough to allow him to overlook the many times he had witnessed a column fail. The first of these factors was his resistance to any technological changes on the battlefield. While admittedly, the eighteenth century had seen little technological shift in military armament, the nineteenth century saw great leaps in technology, particularly in firearms, but also in transportation and communication technologies like railroads and telegraphs. Alive and writing until 1869, Jomini witnessed and discussed the introduction of new rifles, including the Prussian Dreyse Needle Gun and the French Chassepot, saw the use of railroads and steamships for transport, including in the Crimean and Austro-Prussian War, and was alive for the failure of deep-order bayonet charges, as at Inkerman during the Crimean War and on several occasions during the American Civil War.<sup>227</sup> New interchangeable guns showcased by Samuel Colt in 1836, mass-production of guns at armouries like Enfield, new bullets, and new rifled breech-loaders used with success by France in the Wars of Italian Unification (1859) were simply a few of the important changes over Jomini's lifetime.<sup>228</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5249-51.

<sup>226</sup> Hart, 114.

<sup>227</sup> Black, 63, 68; Azar Gat, *The Development of Military Thought: The Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 27-28. Moreover, as Glover notes, civilian technologies like the electric field telegraph and the railway were being put to use for the first time in conflicts during the mid-nineteenth century. Glover, 94-94; Geoffrey Wawro, *The Franco-Prussian War: The German Conquest of France in 1870-1871* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 135.

<sup>228</sup> Gary Cross and Rick Szostak, *Technology and American Society: A History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc., 2005), 193-194; Black, 67.

Despite these seemingly fundamental changes, however, Jomini remained opposed to idea of any technological advantages on the battlefield. This is first because Jomini felt there would be little discrepancy between the technologies of various states. Jomini concludes that "if these arms aided the allies at the Alma and Inkermann, it was because the Russians were not provided with them; and it must not be forgotten that in a year or two all armies will alike be furnished with them, so that in future the advantage will not be confined to one side."<sup>229</sup> This was the case, he stressed, because technologies were close to reaching their apex.<sup>230</sup> Moreover, Jomini remained adamant that new technologies would not bring any stalemate or indecision to the battlefield. Writing on the results of the Crimean War, for example, Jomini states:

The heroic events which have recently occurred near Sebastopol have not produced the slightest change in my opinion. This gigantic contest between two vast intrenched [sic] camps, occupied by entire armies and mounting two thousand guns of the largest calibre, is an event without precedent, which will have no equal in the future; for the circumstances which produced it cannot occur again.<sup>231</sup>

Jomini thus answers the question plaguing his contemporaries:

Will whole armies be deployed as skirmishers, or will it not still be necessary to preserve either the formation of lines deployed in two or three ranks, or lines of battalions in columns? Will battles become mere duels with the rifle, where the parties will fire upon each other, without maneuvering, until one or the other shall retreat or be destroyed? What military man will reply in the affirmative? It follows, therefore, that, to decide battles, maneuvers are necessary, and victory will fall to the general who maneuvers most skillfully; and he cannot maneuver except with deployed lines or lines of columns of battalions, either whole or subdivided into columns of one or two companies.<sup>232</sup>

As Jomini did not believe that new technologies would alter the manoeuvres of the battlefield, his deep-order tactics like the *ordre profond* were in theory not threatened by new

<sup>229</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 5310-13.

<sup>230</sup> "The means of destruction are approaching perfection with frightful rapidity." *Ibid.*, Loc. 596-603.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5180-88. Elsewhere, Jomini continues this argument: "To bury an army in intrenchments [sic], where it may be outflanked and surrounded, or forced in front even if secure from a flank attack, is manifest folly; and it is to be hoped that we shall never see another instance of it." Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 2254-56.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5314-21.

technologies; though, in practice these new technologies proved devastating.<sup>233</sup> In his resistance to new technologies, however, Jomini was not alone. Instead, he spoke for the majority of military professionals. Shy suggests that Jomini's predictions for military technology "appealed deeply to generations of soldiers" who were largely committed to obedience, order, and conservatism."<sup>234</sup> Furthermore, Shy continues, Jomini's view of "military reality" allowed military professionals "to stifle doubts provoked by experiences like that of 1866 and to fend off unwelcome criticism of military policy."<sup>235</sup> As a result, the conclusions made by Jomini about military technology, as follows, were widely upheld between 1815 and 1869:

From all these discussions we may draw the following conclusions, viz: 1. That the improvements in fire-arms will not introduce any important change in the manner of taking troops into battle . . . 2. That if Wellington's system of deployed lines and musketry-fire be excellent for the defense, it would be difficult ever to employ it in an attack upon an enemy in position. 3. That, in spite of the improvements of fire-arms, two armies in a battle will not pass the day in firing at each other from a distance: it will always be necessary for one of them to advance to the attack of the other. 4. That, as this advance is necessary, success will depend, as formerly, upon the most skillful maneuvering according to the principles of grand tactics, which consist in this, viz.: in knowing how to direct the great mass of the troops at the proper moment upon the decisive point of the battle-field, and in employing for this purpose the simultaneous action of the three arms. 5. That it would be difficult to add much to what has been said on this subject in Chapters IV. and V. . . . 6. That victory may with much certainty be expected by the party taking the offensive when the general in command possesses the talent of taking his troops into action in good order and of boldly attacking the enemy.<sup>236</sup>

A second key factor in Jomini's insistence that the *ordre profond* was still viable is his belief in universal principles. Like Folard and Saxe before him, Jomini firmly believed in universal rules guiding warfare, as applicable to "Alexander and Caesar as well as [to] Frederick

<sup>233</sup> At the Battle of Solferino (1859), for example, while the defeated Austrians lost approximately 22,000 men, the French lost over 17,000 in their successful advance. Black, 68; Shy complains that Jomini's "insistence that not even the most radical changes in military technology can alter the principles of war seems to explain a mentality that could order cavalry to attack machine guns or describe nuclear energy as "just another weapon." Shy, 164.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 176; Hart, 113.

<sup>235</sup> Shy, 176.

<sup>236</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 5379-97.

and Napoleon.”<sup>237</sup> Foremost, this outlook encourages Jomini to look to history for examples of the fundamental principles of war. Positing that “history alone furnishes us instruction,” in his *Précis de l’art de Guerre* Jomini studies and compares everything from Xerxes’ Persian army and Epaminondas’ Theban Sacred Band to Frederick the Great, the armies of the French Republic and Napoleon, and the armies of his own generation.<sup>238</sup> In comparing the campaigns and generals of history, Jomini concludes that despite technological changes, “victory would, now as ever, result from the application of the principles which had led to the success of great generals in all ages,” since the fundamental principles of war “are independent of the nature of the arms and the organization of the troops.”<sup>239</sup> Jomini defends his conclusion that universal principles direct war, and announces that “after having written the detailed history of thirty campaigns and assisted in person in twelve of the most celebrated of them, to declare that I have not found a single case where these principles, correctly applied, did not lead to success.”<sup>240</sup> Jomini concludes that the foremost universal principle of war is “to throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point.”<sup>241</sup> Though Jomini means this to apply to strategy, it is of course the very guiding principle of the *ordre profond*, and is the reason given by Alexander, Caesar, Saxe, and the French Revolutionaries for the use of column attacks.

Notably, Jomini was supported in this belief in universal principles by Napoleon himself.

The *Maxims* of Napoleon, a collection of the Emperor’s quotations and thoughts on war, were

<sup>237</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5180-88; Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 14.

<sup>238</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 2523-24; 2053-54; 538-40; 793-98; 804-7; 548-51; 2825-27; 2888-91.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5180-88. Shy notes that Jomini’s conclusion that “if victory for some reason should elude the commander, he must not expect it from any other system, but must try again, using sound principles – massing, attacking persisting” – provides an ominous, though unintentional, prediction of the First World War. Shy, 152. Two key weaknesses in Jomini’s historical analyses, Shy points out, were that Jomini refused to investigate historical examples where his principles did not apply, and that he assumed all military units were equally armed, trained, motivated, and supplied. Shy, 175.

<sup>240</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 5165-67; Seemingly on the defensive, Jomini sticks to this conclusion, stating that “if a few prejudiced military men . . . still contend that it has neither principles nor rules, I can only pity them, and reply, in the famous words of Frederick, that “a mule which had made twenty campaigns under Prince Eugene would not be a better tactician than at the beginning.” *Ibid.*, Loc. 4914-17.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 946-954.

widely published and read throughout the nineteenth century.<sup>242</sup> Though they deal primarily with strategy – covering everything from lines of operation, communication lines, when and when not to engage the enemy, and where and when to camp – the *Maxims* did little to dispel the idea of universal principles. Occasional maxims could easily allow the reader to connect Jomini, Napoleon, and universals. Maxim V, for example, states “All Wars should be governed by certain principles, for every war should have a definite object, and be conducted according to the rules of art.”<sup>243</sup> If this did not provide a plain enough link for readers between Jomini’s universals and Napoleon, Maxim LXXVIII states it more clearly:

Peruse again and again the campaigns of Alexander, Hannibal, Caesar, Gustavus Adolphus, Turenne, Eugene, and Frederick. Model yourself upon them. This is the only means of becoming a great captain, and of acquiring the secret of the art of war. Your own genius will be enlightened and improved by this study, and you will learn to reject all maxims foreign to the principles of these great commanders.<sup>244</sup>

Thus, Jomini’s universal principles were widely accepted and acclaimed as Napoleon’s true key to success.

Thirdly, Jomini condenses warfare into a compact and regulated system based on his universal principles. After all, he claims to be the first to point out the universal principles, and the first to lay down their various applications.<sup>245</sup> By condensing war into practical and simple rules, Jomini is foremost answering the desire of commanders to live up to the success of Napoleon without possessing the Emperor’s genius:

Correct theories, founded upon right principles, sustained by actual events of wars, and added to accurate military history, will form a true school of instruction for generals. If these means do not produce great men, they will at least produce

<sup>242</sup> Phillips, 219-220.

<sup>243</sup> Napoleon Bonaparte, *The Officer’s Manual: Napoleon’s Maxims of War*, ed. James G. Gregory (New York: C.A. Alvord, 1861), 17.

<sup>244</sup> Bonaparte, *Maxims*, 186.

<sup>245</sup> “I lay no claim to the creation of these principles, for they have always existed, and were applied by Caesar, Scipio, and the Consul Nero, as well as by Marlborough and Eugene; but I claim to have been the first to point them out, and to lay down the principal changes in their various applications.” *Ibid.*, Loc. 1828-32.

generals of sufficient skill to take rank next after the natural masters of the art of war.<sup>246</sup>

As a result, Jomini outlines the twelve essential conditions for making a perfect army, the five principal parts of the art of war, the four fundamental maxims of warfare, the three kinds of battle, the six tactical positions, the twelve orders of battle, and the four methods of attack – of which the *ordre profond* is one.<sup>247</sup> Jomini maintains that by following the principles which he lays out, a skilful general, not necessarily a genius, will be able to perfect the art of war.<sup>248</sup> Though Shy contests that Jomini takes this approach simply to sell more books, it seems that Jomini in fact believed the principles to be true.<sup>249</sup> He defends the numerous examples of the *ordre profond*'s failure, for example: "Shall their occasional failure be a sufficient reason for entirely denying their value and for distrusting the effect of the study of an art? Shall a theory be pronounced absurd because it has only three-fourths of the whole number of chances of success in its favour?"<sup>250</sup> Jomini even admits that he has never seen a column charge result in a successful bayonet clash and piercing of the enemy line:

In fact, in real combats of infantry I have never seen anything but battalions deployed commencing to fire by company, and finally by file, or else columns marching firmly against the enemy, who either retired without awaiting the columns, or repulsed them before an actual collision took place, or themselves moved out to meet the advance. I have seen melees of infantry in defiles, and in villages, where the heads of columns came in actual bodily collision and thrust each other with the bayonet; but I never saw such a thing on a regular field of battle.<sup>251</sup>

Nevertheless, he continues to uphold the *ordre profond* as a central part of the tactical canon, something he would presumably not do unless he believed it to be a universal principle that the

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4917-20.

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 522-36; 877-78; 946-54; 984-86; 2647-49; 2688-95; 4411-15.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4247-49.

<sup>249</sup> Shy argues: "There is in Jomini, not surprisingly, an important element of pure salesmanship; he knew what his readers wanted, and he gave it to them." Shy, 162.

<sup>250</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 4857-64.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 4567-71.



*ordre profond* would work providing commanders used it correctly. As he notes near the end of his *Précis*, "All my works go to show the eternal influence of principles, and to demonstrate that operations to be successful must be applications of principles."<sup>252</sup>

Finally, Jomini's plans and teachings throughout his *Précis sur l'art de Guerre* stress the importance of geometric, pitched battles. This is in part because of his belief in universal principles. By outlining essential and universal tactical forms, Jomini necessarily limited himself to geometric and symmetrical shapes.<sup>253</sup> Jomini states this faith in geometric universals quite clearly: "It follows, therefore, that to decide battles, maneuvers are necessary, and victory will fall to the general who maneuvers most skilfully; and he cannot maneuver except with deployed lines or lines of columns of battalions."<sup>254</sup> He maintains faith in geometric battles as decisive and war-winning, expecting pitched battles to remain the ultimate form of warfare. Denouncing guerrilla wars as "dangerous and deplorable," Jomini maintains that the organized battle was the most preferable form of warfare, and hence found no need for alternatives.<sup>255</sup> Perhaps the key to Jomini's geometric approach were the models which he used to express his thoughts. As Black points out, Jomini conceptualized and operationalized military tactics in terms he was familiar with. Black suggests these terms were defined within Napoleonic warfare.<sup>256</sup> While the model of Napoleonic warfare would have contributed to Jomini's emphasis on geometric battle, it seems just as likely that Henry Lloyd, Marshal Saxe, and Guibert, all of whom Jomini cites and mentions repeatedly throughout his *Précis*, were key influences. Conceptualizing warfare in terms of these eighteenth-century authors, Jomini had little choice *but* to understand tactics in terms of geometric forms and symmetrical shapes. And while this approach is perhaps applicable

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<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 1811-12.

<sup>253</sup> Black, 28.

<sup>254</sup> Jomini, *Art of War*, Loc. 5314-21.

<sup>255</sup> Jomini, quoted in Shy, 170-171.

<sup>256</sup> Black, 27.

at times, in Jomini's case it results in a favourable view of the *ordre profond*. On paper, without any allowance for technological advancement, Jomini's column is just the same as Folard's column from a century earlier, and in fact not very different from Alexander the Great's *phalanx*. Moreover, on paper the column appears the decisive geometric shape, far faster and more powerful than the line. Yet in reality, results proved far different.

## VIII. *The French Military and Jomini*

Jomini's position on the *ordre profond* was not destined to lead to its continued use. Indeed, Jomini was only one man, and his teachings may well have been cast aside. Yet, as will now be discussed, conditions in France led to an upholding of Jomini, and therefore a retention of the column. By and large, Jomini was not unique, but rather a product of his time. Following Napoleon's successes, and despite the Emperor's denial of any systematic approach to warfare, the generation after 1815 was left trying to determine exactly what made Napoleon successful.<sup>257</sup> Hart suggests that the dominant minds in Europe after 1815 were "hypnotized" by Napoleon's campaigns, leaving the door open for anyone who could provide a systematic approach to reproduce Napoleonic success.<sup>258</sup> At the same time, Europe – and France especially – was experiencing a return to the conservatism of the *ancien régime*. This *ancien régime redux*, as Black terms it, saw a return to pre-Revolutionary understandings of battle and warfare.<sup>259</sup> As a result, Jomini had an extremely wide influence. Shy notes that in France, Jomini "had established himself almost instantly as the authoritative interpreter of Napoleonic warfare." Any shifts in the

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<sup>257</sup> Rothenberg, 147.

<sup>258</sup> Hart, 101-102.

<sup>259</sup> Black, 57.

French approach to warfare during the nineteenth century, Shy continues, “took place within the framework of Jominian orthodoxy.”<sup>260</sup> Moreover, it was not simply in France that Jomini enjoyed influence. Though he lived in France for much of his life, Jomini was employed by and wrote for the Russian army, and served as an advisor to the Tsars. Jomini was also influential in Britain and particularly to Napier, the best known British tactician at the time.<sup>261</sup> In the United States, Jomini became the primary text at the military academy at West Point, praised as the “highest authority” on war.<sup>262</sup> Even in Germany, Jomini was held to as an operational manual. Despite the influence of Clausewitz, historian Paret argues, it was Jomini who remained the operational text, while Clausewitz was used as grounds for discussing war’s role within society.<sup>263</sup> Examining the conditions of the nineteenth-century French military, it can be determined not only why Jomini had a strong influence, but why Jomini’s support for the *ordre profond* took root.

In France, a key factor in Jomini’s lasting influence was the sudden shift towards conservatism in the army following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. Returning to power in “the baggage train of the allies,” the restored Bourbon monarchy could hardly risk a foreign war against any of the allies from Waterloo.<sup>264</sup> Replacing generals in the former Napoleonic army with newly returned *émigrés*, the Restoration period saw a reaction against new tactics and a return to pre-1789 tactical debates and forms, including the *ordre profond*.<sup>265</sup> On the other hand, there also existed a “cult of glory,” a strong lobby group dedicated to the glories which the

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<sup>260</sup> Shy, 180.

<sup>261</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 5-8; Shy, 177.

<sup>262</sup> Black, 27-28.

<sup>263</sup> Peter Paret, quoted in Shy, 178.

<sup>264</sup> Robert Tombs, *France: 1814-1914* (Toronto: Pearson Education Limited, 1996), 36.

<sup>265</sup> Hart argues that Jomini was the champion of this return to eighteenth-century tactics which emphasized above all “safety first.” Hart, 114.

Revolution and Napoleon had brought to France. They too looked to the *ordre profond* for tactical influence, but this time to emulate the glorious, mythical columns of the French Republic.<sup>266</sup> However, the Bourbon Restoration (1814-1830) and the July Monarchy (1830-1848) saw little investment in military thought or development. Military academies received little attention or funding, and the *Règlement* of 1791 remained in place into the 1840s, receiving only minor adjustments after that.<sup>267</sup> The French preference came to rest on the *grogards*, the veterans of the army who had seen years of campaigns. Yet these *grogards* were also old, indifferent, and largely opposed to any change.<sup>268</sup> At the command levels, *grogards* stuck to the Napoleonic models they had grown up with; in the rank and file, *grogards* valued obstinate bravery above all else, and were happy to advance in traditional formation in order to demonstrate their manly, marshal qualities.<sup>269</sup> At all levels of the French army, then, there was little opportunity for innovation or change.

Changes within the French military were also limited by popular resistance against militarism. This was especially the case during the Second Empire (1852-1870). Politically vulnerable after his 1851 *coup d'état*, Napoleon III was unable to risk alienating any political group or faction. Throughout the 1860s, Napoleon III was faced with increasing gridlocks in parliament and factionalism which threatened his position. Anti-war sentiment during the Second Empire grew for three main reasons. First, memory of Napoleon's *coup d'état* supported by the military remained too strong for the public to allow an increase in the army's strength.<sup>270</sup> Second, by the 1860s, France had enjoyed peace at home since the 1848 Revolution. Consequently,

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<sup>266</sup> Tombs, 341.

<sup>267</sup> Hart, 18.

<sup>268</sup> Wawro, 42.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>270</sup> Michael Howard, *Franco-Prussian War: The German Invasion of France, 1870-1871* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1961), 30.

interest in war was fleeting at best, and the middle class in particular invested its interests elsewhere.<sup>271</sup> Finally, the majority of France had become disillusioned with Napoleon III's colonial adventures, which had largely proven unsuccessful.<sup>272</sup> In response to Napoleon's calls for the establishment of an army reserve system, one politician objected: "Can the mobiles be called when we wage war in Mexico, Italy, or in Cochin China? The right to declare war rests with the Emperor. Let's not give him many of our fellow citizens to send to war."<sup>273</sup> The Mexican fiasco (1862-1866) in particular provoked resistance to military spending.<sup>274</sup> As a result of this opposition, and despite recognition of significant flaws within his army, Napoleon III was unable to enact much-needed military reform.<sup>275</sup>

Political weakness resulted in a lack of a competent General Staff in France, especially under Napoleon III. Unlike the diligent, organized, meticulous Prussian General Staff under Moltke, the French had a backwash of indifferent Generals who gained their position through seniority rather than talent.<sup>276</sup> Though Napoleon III and Marshal Niel attempted to reform the stubborn and ineffective Staff, they were faced with multiple obstacles. First, Napoleon III was unwilling to appoint a Supreme Commander, as he felt that the authority given to this individual

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<sup>271</sup> One such distraction was the Exhibition hosted in Paris. Bird, 2; Sudhir Hazareesingh, "A Common Sentiment of National Glory: Civic Festivities and French Collective Sentiment under the Second Empire," *Journal of Modern History* 76, no.2 (2004): 303-306.

<sup>272</sup> Howard, 30.

<sup>273</sup> Jules Simon, quoted in Arpad F. Kovaks, "French Military Institutions before the Franco-Prussian War," *American Historical Review* 51, no.2 (1946): 228.

<sup>274</sup> As a result of the legacy of the Mexican campaign, upon the announcement of the war with Prussians, several parliamentarians objected, one of whom shouted "We will not stand for an aggressive, dynastic war!" Jules Favre also stood up, denouncing the war as "another Mexico; you tell us one thing and we are deceived." Favre, quoted in Wawro, 39.

<sup>275</sup> The one key lesson gained from the Austro-Prussian War, one tactician claimed, was "the absolute necessity of staff and supply departments being *organised and trained in time of peace*." Faced with opposition to any expansion of the army, Napoleon III was unable to make even this key change. Sir Archibald Alison, *On Army Organization* (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1869), 5.

<sup>276</sup> Lt. Col. Charles C. Chesney, *The Military Resources of Prussia and France and Recent Changes in the Art of War* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1870), 167; Brian Murphy, "French Technology was trumped by German Organization during the Franco-Prussian War" (review article), *Military History* (June 2003): 66.

could undermine his own power.<sup>277</sup> When Napoleon III finally did accept the necessity to appoint a generalissimo, his first choice – Marshal Niel – died, and plans to create the new position were scrapped.<sup>278</sup> Facing a deadlock within the army, political rivals refused to cooperate or agree. Even when the appointment method of General Staff was reformed, Napoleon III was unable to find candidates who would not spend their time seeking personal advancement in spite of each other.<sup>279</sup> Contributing to this was the fact that, due to political instability, Napoleon III had alienated all officers who posed a political threat, and many competent officers were either shipped to Algeria or blacklisted.<sup>280</sup>

As a result of this instability and infighting in the French army between 1815 and 1869, resistance to the *ordre profond*, when it did crop up, was not taken seriously enough. Three key attempts were made to draw attention to the serious flaws in French tactical forms, but these were largely ignored or dismissed. The most thorough was a treatise written by Ardant du Picq, a young officer who had been commissioned to investigate the operations of the French army after having served in the Crimean War.<sup>281</sup> Though du Picq is often upheld as the father of the “cult of offensive” which proved so disastrous for France during the Great War, in his *Battle Studies*, du Picq strongly denounces dense formations and attacking charges.<sup>282</sup> Clearly recognizing

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<sup>277</sup> General Trochu complained about this lack of any military authority in France: “The Emperor, whose will is the only tangible form of authority, does not boast of high military talents, and has been unfortunate in several of his military experiments. After him, there is in France no general of such indisputable pre-eminence and authority that he could at once give the vigour and unity of paramount command to the whole military system.” Trochu, quoted in Chesney, 167.

<sup>278</sup> Wawro, 50.

<sup>279</sup> Howard, 16.

<sup>280</sup> Wawro, 7.

<sup>281</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 28-29; Du Picq stressed that he emphasized tactics based on experience, rather than following the teachings of Jomini: “The smallest detail, taken from an actual incident in war is more instructive for me, a soldier, than all the Thiers and Jominis in the world.” Du Picq, quoted in Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 29.

<sup>282</sup> Gat notes that du Picq’s role as the mentor and influence for the French school of the offensive – and particularly of Foch – has recently come under question. Suggesting that the 1921 translators of du Picq deliberately solicited Foch’s recommendation in order to popularize their work, Gat indicates that Foch (known for his extensive name-dropping) does not cite du Picq at all. This suggests to many, Gat concludes, that du Picq had no role in the development of the ‘cult of the offensive’ at all. Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 41.

technological developments over his life-time, du Picq notes the advantage which new weaponry – particularly breech-loading rifles – gave to the defenders, and upholds the defensive as the advantageous position.<sup>283</sup> More importantly, he denounces the deep order tactics which the generals around him employed, stating quite clearly that “the close column is absurd; it turns you in advance into a flock of sheep, where officers and men are jumbled together without mutual support.”<sup>284</sup> Du Picq states that there is in fact no shock value in infantry tactics, and that, based on experience in Crimea, “the power of mass had no influence.”<sup>285</sup> Moreover, du Picq concludes that the morale effect of *ordre profond* was a myth. Though meant to inspire the troops to press forward, du Picq notes the opposite was true:

In modern masses, in French masses especially, the march can be continued, but the mass loses while marching under fire. Moral pressure, continually exerted during a long advance, stops one-half of the combatants on the way. To-day, above all in France, man protests against such use of his life . . . Let us take Wagram, where [Napoleon's] mass was not repulsed. Out of twenty-two thousand men, three thousand to fifteen hundred reached the position . . . Were the nineteen thousand missing men disabled? No. Seven out of twenty-two, a third, an enormous proportion may have been hit. What became of the twelve thousand unaccounted for? They had lain down on the road, had played dummy in order not to go on to the end . . . Nothing is easier than dropping out through inertia; Nothing more common.<sup>286</sup>

Du Picq stresses that any order is impossible within column attacks: “In a battalion in closed column . . . no one has control . . . Even if, in virtue of the first impulse, the position is carried,

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<sup>283</sup> For example, du Picq notes: “One infantry must always close with another under rapid fire from troops in position, and such a fire is, to-day more than ever, to the advantage of the defense. Ten men come towards me; they are at four hundred meters; with the ancient arm, I have time to kill but two before they reach me; with rapid fire, I have time to kill four or five. Morale does not increase with losses. The eight remaining might reach me in the first case; the five or six remaining will certainly not in the second.” Du Picq, Charles-Jean-Jacques-Joseph Ardant du Picq, *Battle Studies: Ancient and Modern Battle*, trans. John Greely and Robert Cotton (1921), Kindle Edition, Loc. 1672-1676; Elsewhere, du Picq notes that new fire-arms had given the advantage decisively to the defensive, rendering advance unlikely: “This is so evident that only a madman could dispute it.” Du Picq, quoted in Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 36.

<sup>284</sup> Du Picq, Loc. 1580.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 1584, 1595;

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 1613-1617.



the disorder is so great that if it is counter-attack by four men, it is lost.”<sup>287</sup> This sentiment notably aligns extraordinarily closely with the sentiment expressed of the *ordre profond* in the Revolutionary Wars.<sup>288</sup>

Denouncing the legion of Marshal Saxe, the drills of Frederick the Great, and the tendency towards shock action, du Picq stresses that infantry is best served and most effective when fighting as skirmishers, citing his own experience as well as the American Civil War as evidence.<sup>289</sup> Du Picq denounces the tacticians who support mass-shock tactics, claiming that “the greater number of generals who fought in the last wars, *under real battle conditions*, ask for skirmishers in large units . . . [The men] do not fight otherwise.”<sup>290</sup> He underlines that when deep masses are used, most often the soldiers dissolve themselves into skirmisher units despite their commands.<sup>291</sup> Very simply, du Picq concludes, “attacks in deep masses . . . are not wise, and never were wise.”<sup>292</sup> Yet, despite these very clear warnings, du Picq passed unrecognized. Political instability, the entrenchment of Jomini, the lack of a General Staff, and the strong resistance to change all halted du Picq’s rise to prominence. Sadly, du Picq was killed in 1870 during the Franco-Prussian War and his work was not published until 1880, remaining relatively unknown until at least 1903.<sup>293</sup>

Alongside du Picq, two other generals condemned the *ordre profond* loudly, but with similarly limited success. The first was Marshal Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, a strong influence on du Picq, who denounced mass formations and column attacks in his *Maximes, conseils et instructions sur l’art de la guerre*, published in 1863. An officer with experience under Suchet, a

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<sup>287</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 90.

<sup>288</sup> See above, Carnot, page 35.

<sup>289</sup> Du Picq, Loc. 1619-1630.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 1637; Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 36.

<sup>291</sup> Du Picq, Loc. 1691.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 1664.

<sup>293</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 39, 41.

Napoleonic-era General, as well as considerable experience in Algeria, Bugeaud spoke out against the column used by the generals around him.<sup>294</sup> Calling it “cumbersome,” Bugeaud suggested that deep columns were too vulnerable to enemy fire to be feasible on the battlefield.<sup>295</sup> Though his writings were influential for generals engaged in colonial warfare, Bugeaud made little impact in metropolitan France.<sup>296</sup> The second, General Trochu, was also a great influence on du Picq. In his pamphlet *L'Armée Française en 1867*, Trochu outlined the weaknesses within the French military and recommended programs of reform, including new sharpshooters, trench systems, light infantry and flexible tactics.<sup>297</sup> Though a proponent of the universal principles of war, Trochu complained that deep-order tactics “were invented at the time when troops could advance in procession to take up their ground in safety.”<sup>298</sup> Given the progress of artillery and the new range of firearms, Trochu concluded that “bodies of men are not safe anywhere,” and that old tactics had been replaced by “elasticity, mobility, and the relative independence of its component parts.”<sup>299</sup> Yet, due to the political infighting in the French General Staff during the 1860s, it was exactly because of this pamphlet that Trochu was denied a command and cast from influence by Napoleon III. Like Bugeaud and du Picq, Trochu’s warning went unheeded, and the French army continued to operate just as it had since 1792.

The final, and perhaps most important, factor in the retention of the *ordre profond* in French military doctrine was the simple fact that the French were successful in their various wars between 1815 and 1869. Shy argues that throughout the nineteenth century, warfare remained limited in scale and execution, and therefore “after Waterloo little or nothing happened to shake

<sup>294</sup> Thomas-Robert Bugeaud, *Maximes, conseils et instructions sur l'art de la Guerre ou aide-mémoire pratique de la guerre a l'usage des militaires de toutes armes et de tous pays* (Paris : Leneveu, 1863), 26-27.

<sup>295</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>296</sup> Jean Gottmann, “Bugeaud, Galliéni, Lyautey: The Development of French Colonial Warfare,” in *Makers of Modern Strategy*, ed. Edward M. Earle (Princeton: Princeton University Press 1943): 234-59.

<sup>297</sup> Chesney, 158-161.

<sup>298</sup> Louis Jules Trochu, *L'Armée Française en 1867* (Paris: Limoges, Charles-Lavauzelle, 1867), 163.

<sup>299</sup> Trochu, 163.

the paradigm of Jominian theory until 1914.”<sup>300</sup> Based on their successes in the Crimea, Italy, Algeria, and Mexico, the French assumed that their army was at the peak of its form. These victories encouraged the “*système D*,” based off the French expression “*on se débrouillera toujours*” – one always muddles through somehow.<sup>301</sup> The French felt they could trust in the bravery and spirit of their soldiers, and threw together ad hoc campaigns in an attempt to emulate Napoleon I’s seemingly improvised successes.<sup>302</sup> When it prepared for war in 1870, Trochu remarked, the French army was as prepared “as it had been for the Crimean War, for the Italian War, for the Mexican adventure, for all the military enterprises of that era; that is to say, ready to fight successfully. . . against armies constituted and trained like itself.”<sup>303</sup> What the French found when they entered war in 1870, however, was that their army was tactically outdated. Despite being armed with superior firearms, the French threw away their advantage by persisting with deep-order tactics and column charges.

Although the French reliance on deep-order tactics was by far not the only cause for their loss of the Franco-Prussian war, it was certainly a contributing factor. This reliance on Jominian tactics in fact squandered what battlefield advantages the French might have had. First, it meant that even with new, vastly superior rifles, the French were unable to effectively exploit their range and firing-speed advantage over the Prussians. Clinging to deep-order tactics, the French maintained heavy infantry units, regulated firing, and slow battalion-based attacks; yet in initial skirmishes the Chassepot had demonstrated its value when used in exactly the opposite sort of

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<sup>300</sup> Shy, 180.

<sup>301</sup> Wawro, 66.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibidem*; This reliance on a system based on its success is not unusual. The British hesitation to adopt steamships, preferring to retain their sail-based navy well into the nineteenth century, provides another good example of how military professionals might overlook new technologies. William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, armed force, and society since AD. 1000* (University of Chicago Press, 1982), 226.

<http://ezproxy.library.uvic.ca/login?url=http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.00833>

<sup>303</sup> Trochu, quoted in Howard, 39.

tactical formations.<sup>304</sup> Likewise, the French *mitrailleuse*, a primitive machine gun, might have been extremely effective, but Generals refused adequate testing of the gun, resulting in its misuse on the battlefield.<sup>305</sup> Dominant opinion held that French victory would result from superior morale and spirit, not tactical changes.<sup>306</sup> French tacticians found only confusion in Prussian light-infantry systems, and maintained faith in their antiquated tactics and supposedly superior morale.<sup>307</sup> This unwillingness to adapt left the French – and the Austrians who copied them – sorely unprepared on the battlefields against the Prussians.<sup>308</sup> Combined with their strategic and political errors prior to 1870, the French approach to war cost hundreds of thousands of casualties. As a result of the loss to Prussia in 1870-71, after roughly a century, the *ordre profond* was finally exposed.

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<sup>304</sup> Wawro, 93.

<sup>305</sup> Instead of spraying the Prussian lines with continuous fire, the French used the *mitrailleuse* to pump dozens of bullets into a single soldier, making the weapon feared but largely ineffective. Testing was in fact refused on the basis of keeping the new weapon secret. Wawro, 53.

<sup>306</sup> Napoleon III actually had to overrule the General Staff in order to purchase the Chassepot, as most agreed with General Randon, who claimed it would not be by “improved weapons but by increased morale that the French army would win the next war.” Randon, quoted in Howard, 35.

<sup>307</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 25.

<sup>308</sup> McNeill, 245.

## IX. "The Art of War, like All the Sciences"<sup>309</sup>

After being defeated by the Prussians in 1870-71, the French finally returned to the drawing board, and the *ordre profond* was taken out of the tactical canon. Yet it was arguably not retired, but promoted. After 1870, a new "cult of the offensive" developed in France which valued, above all else, mass attacks over land, decisive infantry movements, and the *élan* and bravery of the masses.<sup>310</sup> Though the *ordre* no longer existed on paper, in practice the new strategic goals of the French army were simply the goals of the column on a larger scale. As Shy argues, it is clear that the belief in universal principles, a linear approach to military history, and the understanding of warfare through the "framework of Jominian orthodoxy" did not disappear after 1871.<sup>311</sup> It is therefore not surprising that shortly before the Great War began, one general complained that a group of neo-Napoleonic tacticians had revived the deep order, ignoring the

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<sup>309</sup> Trochu, 159.

<sup>310</sup> Hart, 135.

<sup>311</sup> Shy, 179-180.

needs of modern war. His warnings, however, went unheard.<sup>312</sup> Despite its many shortcomings, the *ordre profond* did not lose its romantic appeal. Arguably, French tacticians clung to the *ordre* even into the Great War, ending mass frontal attacks only after the Nivelle offensive and mutiny in 1917.<sup>313</sup> Even in recent histories, though, the column retains its celebrated role as the key tactical success of the Revolutionary Wars, and has been considered by many to be a fundamental part of modern warfare. It is in asking why the *ordre profond* has retained its reputation and position in history that the study of the *ordre* reveals its key importance. For, as will be argued in this concluding section, the persistence of the *ordre profond* reveals three key features in military historiography which require analysis: universals, linearity, and an emphasis on battle.

Foremost, the *ordre profond* provides a strong argument against the existence of universal principles in warfare. Yet, throughout the twentieth century, many military historians and tacticians have clung to universal principles. Foch, one of the most celebrated tacticians of the twentieth century, stated that the First World War had, “in spite of all its novel features, shown once more that the fundamental principles of tactics remain unchanged, and that no man can understand the principles of warfare, much less be a leader of soldiers, until he has mastered these principles.”<sup>314</sup> Gilbert, a contemporary of Foch, decided that frontal attacks must be risked, despite the costs, for the eternal principles of war dictated the imperative of inflicting a powerful and decisive blow.<sup>315</sup> But this approach is not specific to the early years of the twentieth century. Recently, military historian Victor Davis Hanson has argued that all successes within western

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<sup>312</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 136.

<sup>313</sup> Norman Stone, *World War One* (New York: Basic Books, 2009), 127-130.

<sup>314</sup> Gen. Ferdinand Foch, *The Principles of Wars*, trans. J. de Morinni (New York: H.K. Fly Company Publishers, 1918), 3.

<sup>315</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 137.

warfare have relied on “a series of practices created in the beginning of western culture by the Greeks” and which have remained the fundamental rules of warfare ever since.<sup>316</sup> In this view, the *ordre profond* was not a failed experiment, but a realisation of the universal principles inherited from the Greeks. Likewise, historian Michael Handel, in his *Classical Strategic Thought*, argues that the basic logic of war is “universal,” and that the rules of war were “equally apparent to Sun Tzu, Thucydides, Machiavelli, Clausewitz, or Jomini – as much as they ought to be to any leader of a tribe or state at war – regardless of their cultural or historical differences.”<sup>317</sup> Handel even argues that since the universal paradigm has come under criticism recently, it is “all the more important for students of strategy to better acquaint themselves with the classical works on war.”<sup>318</sup> That Jomini was included as a basic operational text in the US Military Academy’s curriculum suggests that this approach is not long dead.<sup>319</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that the column of the Revolutionary Armies has remained celebrated, and taken a central place in so many explanations of the ‘birth of modern warfare.’ Yet, as has been argued in this study, the *ordre profond* is very clear evidence *against* universal principles in warfare. In the case of the *ordre profond*, a trust in universals was devastating. Perhaps, then, this example serves to demonstrate that instead of looking to define and control war, tacticians should expect war to be uncontrollable and unpredictable, as Clausewitz warned.<sup>320</sup>

The second key factor in the persistence of the *ordre profond*’s positive reputation is an emphasis on linearity within military history. Many military historians see the past as a linear progression of fundamentally similar principles and actions. This whiggish approach is not

<sup>316</sup> Hanson, *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks*, 22.

<sup>317</sup> Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought* (Portland: Frank Cass, 1992), xiii-xiv.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, xv.

<sup>319</sup> Shy, 178.

<sup>320</sup> Shy notes “Clausewitz approached war as a complex totality, seeing it in what may be called tragic terms, always threatening to escape human control.” *Ibid.*, 158.

necessarily unfounded, as it suggests foremost that under pressure, humans revert to a primordial state. John Keegan suggests, for example, that the “savage in all of us lurks not far below the skin.”<sup>321</sup> Whether this is true or not, the central problem with the linear approach to military history is that it allows for the comparison between armies and cultures separated by centuries, if not millennia, as though they were fundamentally similar. In his book *The Origins of War*, for example, Arthur Ferrill directly compares the armies of Napoleon and Alexander the Great, predicting that in conflict the Macedonian phalanx would defeat Napoleon’s army. He therefore suggests that if Napoleon had used a version of the column which was closer to the Macedonian *phalanx* at Waterloo, the Emperor would have won the battle.<sup>322</sup> Likewise, Handel – stating that the works of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu “transcend the limitations of time and place” – analyses the two works to find similarities, and therefore to “discover” universal principles.<sup>323</sup> Handel notes, “Imagine what it would be like if scientists, physicians, or even economists were to rely on a text written over 150, let alone 2,000, years ago as the most valuable source of instruction in their profession.”<sup>324</sup> Yet for Handel, that military historians do borrow from throughout time is the virtue of the entire discipline. However, as this study of the *ordre profond* has attempted to highlight, borrowing tactics from the past without any giving any thought to the cultural, political, and technological differences between past and present is problematic, and has often been extremely bloody.

Liddel Hart suggests an alternate way of looking at warfare, positing that military history has not been governed by continuity and growth, but by change and adaptability. Jeremy Black agrees, stating that the “linear model is mistaken, because a key characteristic of modern warfare

<sup>321</sup> John Keegan, *A History of Warfare* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 1993), 3.

<sup>322</sup> Ferrill notably adds the disclaimer that this would work if artillery were not part of the equation. Arthur Ferrill, *The Origins of War: From the Stone Age to Alexander the Great*, (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), 7, 10.

<sup>323</sup> Handel, 3, 179.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.



is variety – not least in scale, goal and intensity – rather than its conformity to an (or any) essential set of characteristics. However valuable to model-building analysts, the idea of such essentialism is a fiction.”<sup>325</sup> Black highlights changes in non-military technology, such as refrigeration, steam-ships, and disease treatments, to emphasize that militaries do not exist in isolation, and therefore that change and variety are essential factors in combat.<sup>326</sup> Given the example of the *ordre profond*, it seems that this second model better reflects the reality of warfare.

The third key factor which has contributed to the positive reputation of the *ordre profond* is an emphasis on battle. Finding battle to be a key factor in military history, many historians have emphasized the results and procedures of battle above all else. For example, Keegan suggests that the *battles* of the First World War ended European dominance in the colonial world, thereby ignoring any actions or agency within the colonies themselves.<sup>327</sup> Similarly, Victor Davis Hanson finds something fundamentally wrong with any opponent who refuses to accept pitched battle:

... modern western man finds himself in a dilemma. His excellence at frontal assault and decisive battle – now expanded to theatres both above the earth's atmosphere and below the sea – might end all that he holds dear . . . . We in the West may well have to fight as non-westerners – in jungles, stealthily at night and as counter-terrorists – the combat enemies who dare not face us in battle. In consequence, we cannot fully draw on our great Hellenic traditions of superior technology and the discipline and ardour of our free citizen soldiers.<sup>328</sup>

The very title another of Hanson's books, *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past still determine How we Fight, How we Live, and How we Think*, makes this emphasis quite clear.<sup>329</sup> By this

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<sup>325</sup> Black, 9.

<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>327</sup> Keegan, 391.

<sup>328</sup> Hanson, *The Wars of the Ancient Greeks*, 207.

<sup>329</sup> Victor Davis Hanson, *Ripples of Battle: How Wars of the Past still determine How we Fight, How we Live, and How we Think* (New York: Doubleday, 2003).

narrative, the *ordre profond* remains a formative part of modern warfare. As battle is the apex of warfare by this narrative, the *ordre profond* – designed to provide the decisive result in battle no matter the time or technology – is the very pinnacle of western warfare. On the other hand, Jeremy Black suggests an alternative narrative. Suggesting that there needs to be a shift away from emphasizing land warfare in Europe as a paradigm for warfare in general, Black stresses the importance of colonial wars, internal policing, long-term guerilla conflicts, or civil wars, especially in the past 200 years. Black notes that, by and large, battles have not been the decisive factors in society, nor even the primary occupation of militaries. Accordingly, he claims, “Napoleon was less important for the warfare of his lifetime than is usually argued” and “successive generations of reading his example and legacy have been crucially flawed.”<sup>330</sup> Following Black’s argument, then, perhaps the *ordre profond* is also essentially unimportant to warfare, and its reputation should finally be cast aside.

A central question which the *ordre profond* raises, then, is whether warfare is an art, or a science. If it is a science, then universal principles – applicable regardless of time or place – and a linear approach are not only excusable, but are also fundamental to warfare. If warfare is an art, however, then political and social discourses dictate what war is, and therefore it cannot be investigated in a linear manner. Jules Louis Lewal, Inspector General of the French Army, Head of the French Military Academy, and Minister of War in France during the 1880s and 90s argued that warfare “is a positivist science,” dictated by scientific and systematic study.<sup>331</sup> Following Lewal, and exactly like the Ancients of the eighteenth century, Foch argued that tactics were dictated by mathematical calculations.<sup>332</sup> Jomini stated quite clearly that “it is beyond question that war is a distinct science,” and spends the majority of his *Précis* arguing that warfare ought to

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<sup>330</sup> Black, 11.

<sup>331</sup> Gat, *The Nineteenth Century*, 121.

<sup>332</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

be conducted according to scientific methods.<sup>333</sup> Yet, at the same time, Jomini struggles to accept this entirely, and ends his *Précis sur L'Art de Guerre* with the contradictory conclusion that "war is not an exact science, but a drama full of passions that the moral qualities, the talents, the executive foresight and ability, the greatness of character, of the leaders, and the impulses, sympathies, and passions of the masses."<sup>334</sup> Similarly, Liddel Hart argues that warfare is an art which needs "to breathe freely," and to remain open for expansion and expression of thought.<sup>335</sup> Considering the *ordre profond* when approaching this debate, it may be firmly established that warfare cannot operate on exact scientific principles or mathematical equations, nor can it operate without consideration for the surrounding time and place. If the *ordre profond* may serve as an example, then, it must be concluded that warfare is an art. Accordingly, military history must also be an art.

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<sup>333</sup> Jomini, *The Art of War*, Loc. 726.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, Loc. 5152-65.

<sup>335</sup> Hart, 33.

## *X. The Myth of the Ordre Profond*

After nearly a century of development, the long-awaited use of the *ordre profond* on the battlefield proved that deep-order tactics needed serious reconsideration. In reality, the *ordre profond* could not be used effectively unless a number of conditions were met. These conditions included well-disciplined troops, high morale, suitable terrain, artillery support, as well a deficiency in or absence of enemy cavalry, defences, and artillery. The Revolutionary battlefields of 1792-1802, and the Napoleonic battlefields afterwards, regularly failed to meet these requirements. Though the French Revolutionary armies were still successful, it can be concluded that the *ordre profond* cannot be considered wholly or even partially responsible for this success. In practice, it could not answer its designers' three main concerns: desertion, decisiveness, and reliability. Thus, the *ordre profond* was not a revolutionary new system of tactics which paved the way for modern warfare. Instead, the outdated system failed to accurately address the realities of warfare which, it turned out, were moving further and further from deep-order and geometric infantry tactics.

Given the number of problems which plagued the *ordre profond*, after the Napoleonic Wars ended, the *ordre* should in theory have ended with them. Yet this proved not to be the case. As has been examined, the tacticians of the early- to mid- eighteenth century, led by Jomini,

were reluctant to let go of the *ordre*. This was largely for four reasons, all of which Jomini exhibits well. First, military professionals refused to accept that technology would alter warfare. Accordingly, they made no allowances for the possibility that the disadvantage which the *ordre profond* had in the face of heavy fire would only get worse. Second, many military professionals believed in universal principles of warfare. Suggesting that warfare was governed by principles as applicable in the fourth century BCE as they were in the nineteenth century CE, military professionals including Jomini held that the deep-order column was inherently successful, and needed only minor alterations in order to be used correctly. Third, many military writers looked at history as linear, and therefore as a line of essentially comparable and relatable progress. Finally, the conception of warfare placed a heavy emphasis on geometric pitched battles, and terms were understood within an eighteenth-century discourse rather than reflecting reality. Accordingly, on paper the column still seemed not only viable, but dominant.

Military culture within France did little to dispel these beliefs. Despite some resistance to deep-order tactics, most notably from du Picq, Bugeaud, and Trochu, the majority of tacticians remained in agreement with Jomini. This was the result of a number of factors. Primarily, French tacticians between 1815 and 1870 lived in the shadow of Napoleon I, and sought to emulate the successes of the Emperor whenever possible; as the proclaimed interpreter of Napoleonic warfare, Jomini remained the key tactical authority. On the other hand, a return to conservatism and a reactionary, unstable monarchy resulted in stagnation within the army, and little to no investment was put into military development. Even during the Second Empire, a feeling of contentment within France prevented Napoleon III from reforming the army. Finally, the French saw little reason for change, for between 1815 and 1869 they were largely successful, having proved victorious against Spain, Algeria, Russia, and Austria, to name a few. As a result, tactics

were not altered, and the *Règlement* of 1792 remained in place until the mid-century. Ultimately, this left France utterly unprepared for the new kind of warfare which had been developing outside its borders. Even though the drastic loss in the Franco-Prussian War prompted a reevaluation of their tactical systems, and the consequent casting aside of the *ordre profond*, it was arguably not until the Great War that the French truly recognized the ramifications of modern war.

That the *ordre profond* still receives a positive reputation in many historical texts produced today highlights key characteristics within the discipline of military history which may need evaluation. Foremost, many writers still cling to the universal principles of war, understanding warfare as an expression of these principles which ultimately derived from the ancient Greeks. This view has been expressed several times throughout the twentieth century, yet provides the possibility for commanders to strive to follow principles which may be outdated. Second, many historians look at the history of warfare as linear, understanding war as fundamentally analogous regardless of time, culture, or place. Yet, this approach does not adequately allow for regional and cultural differences, and again leads to the danger of applying methods or practices which are outdated. Finally, many historians have emphasized battle as the decisive factor within history. By this narrative, the *ordre profond* is of chief importance, as it could have provided decisive results which would have changed the entire course of history. However, this approach places too great an emphasis on battle without allowing for evolutionary and peripheral determinants, such as technological change, contact with new cultures, geographic limitations, *et cetera*. Though on paper the *ordre profond* had a great intellectual impact, in practice it was not decisive.

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